" 'THE LIGHTS, FOR GOD'S SAKE, THE LIGHTS,' someone yelled. At the same moment I found the switch and saw the man Janos lying on the ground with a dagger in his breast and his face streaked with blood. Oh, it was horrible, horrible . . ." Thus Madame Lafargue concluded her testimony in the strange murder of the Séance Room. Canette, the medium, and the seven others who had been locked in that room when Janos was stabbed could add nothing to her statement. And yet the bloody finger prints across the dead man's white shirt-front belonged to none of them. Bertillon discovered that they corresponded with those of a certain convict named Marinetti, but Marinetti had been buried on Devil's Island years before.

H. ASHTON-WOLFE

says of himself: 'While a pupil and assistant of Dr. Bertillon in Paris, I found the study of criminology so absorbing, so exciting, and so full of opportunities for encountering the weird and fantastic, that I threw myself heart and soul into the work. My knowledge of languages and familiarity with most of Europe's great cities caused me to be chosen very often when investigations were necessary in other countries. Since the war, however, I have ceased to be exclusively engaged in criminal investigation abroad, but my profession as interpreter has brought me constantly in touch with the great investigation centers of the world and I have frequently become intimate with some of the most interesting criminals of modern times.'

Books by H. Ashton-Wolfe

THE THRILL OF EVIL
THE FORGOTTEN CLUE
CRIMES OF VIOLENCE AND REVENGE
CRIMES OF LOVE AND HATE

The Thrill of Evil

by

Ashton-Wolfe

1-B-8

The Riverside Press Cambridge

REFERENCE LIBRARY

DATE

TITLE_____

_____

AUTHOR_____

EDITION_____ SERIES_____

TYPE_____ PLATES_____

PAPER_____

Method of Printing

TEXT_____

INSERTS_____

COVER_____

SUBCONTRACT DATA_____

_____

REMARKS_____

_____

"H M Co. Form 0-412 5M 7-47 BP"

REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.
Archive
Collection

This book may not leave the Offices
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days

The Thrill of Evil

THE AUTHOR AND INSPECTOR LOUYS DISGUISED
AS APACHES WHILE ON DUTY

THE THRILL OF EVIL

BY

H. Ashton-Wolfe

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1930

COPYRIGHT, 1930, BY HARRY ASHTON-WOLFE

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO REPRODUCE
THIS BOOK OR PARTS THEREOF IN ANY FORM

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

To
MISS NORAH PERRIAM
and
LEONARD MOORE
I dedicate this book in sincere friendship, esteem, and gratitude for their able counsel and wise collaboration.
H. ASHTON-WOLFE

FOREWORD

It may be thought that the title of this collection of cases was chosen merely for its melodramatic appeal. That is not so. There is, unfortunately, a very strange and perverse thrill attendant upon evil enterprises — a thrill which springs from those primitive and abysmal instincts latent in the best of us, which for untold ages made the man-ape the most malevolent and cruellest of all creatures. The monster whom Stevenson analysed so fearlessly, the loathsome Hyde, who gloated over each foul deed committed, is a very real entity, only suppressed and held in check by the emotions we name morality, virtue, and piety; barriers which the soul is constantly battling to erect in the path of the innate evil. The cynic would classify these manifestations of man's striving to master the beast within him as so many disguises for selfish fear, the fear of falling a victim to the Hydes around him. But even though one strips the shimmering vestments from the attributes of civilisation, they yet remain a very real necessity; as necessary as the army of police and detectives who jump into the breach when the spiritual barriers are scattered by the primitive monster.

Such men as Dr. Bougrat, who abruptly reverted to savagery; the Oriental, Hanoi Shan, whose diseased mind and body made him a fearsome, cunning creature; or the six-toed Voodoo Priest who delighted in the most complex tortures, prove conclusively that all crime is due to a weakening of the mental fibre. When the lock on the inner door gives way, Hyde takes possession of a body from which the soul flees in horror. Like

the craving for alcohol or morphia, the desire to taste again that tingling, crawling shudder, the thrill of evil, grows and grows until it becomes a habit and a necessity. I have always felt, since first I joined the ranks of those who study the psychology of crime, that our methods of combating it are archaic. They have never changed in principle, even if many of the unspeakably cruel methods of the past have of necessity disappeared. The criminal instinct is a disease, like hereditary drunkenness, and the punishment inflicted to-day is no more a deterrent than the rack, the wheel, and all the tortures of the good old days were deterrents. Indeed, curiously enough, in those countries where capital punishment has been abolished — as, for instance, in Switzerland — murder is almost unknown; whereas in America, where electrocution follows a crime as a matter of course, murders are committed wholesale. This should go far to prove that no murderer was yet held in check by the fear of death. Crimes are rare in Switzerland merely because the Swiss are a placid and healthy people, with few congenital criminals.

Habitual offenders should be treated as beings mentally unbalanced, and eliminated at an early stage from the community; and above all they should be prevented by an efficient legislation from propagating their species, and thus perpetuating criminal tendencies. Instead, prisons as they are to-day ensure the continuance of crime. The degrading influence of the mental atmosphere causes the first offender to feel sharply, inevitably, that now and for evermore he is branded, lost, outcast; whereas the hardened offender draws comfort from the contact of the evil brood surrounding him. They are his justification; he is not alone; others are as bad and worse; and he goes out into the world

again strengthened in his determination to continue a career of crime, fortified in his hatred of the smug, honest citizen, who could do no more than thrust him for a time out of sight behind stone walls. Few people realise the powerful vibrations a multitude of brains can create. The very silence imposed upon prisoners makes for greater mental concentration. The intelligence and emotions of an individual in a crowd are equal to the sum that crowds thoughts, divided by the number of its units. The fool is stimulated, the intellectual degraded. So even in prisons the convict can satisfy his craving for that thrill of evil which originally sent him hurtling down the steep path of crime. At every fresh period behind the bars he sinks lower, his snarling hatred of all mankind grows, and, between-whiles, countless poor helpless mites, tainted and predestined to become prison fodder in their turn, are born into the world at his will. The French only have taken steps to prevent the ceaseless propagation of a tainted species. They send those who are truly incurable — those who have been sentenced several times — to a penal colony. There — their sentence served — they must remain, but receive a grant of land, money, and tools, so that they may live the life of colonists. Alone in the tropical jungle they have few opportunities for satisfying the insatiable craving for that strange sensation, composed of horror, blood-lust, aversion, and exultant bestiality, which is 'the thrill of evil,' and which is akin to pleasure as pain is akin to passion.

H. Ashton-Wolfe

CONTENTS

I. Kiki: A Tale of Hanoi Shan, the Spider 1

II. The Man with the Six Toes 28

III. The Double Life of Doctor Bougrat, Physician and Apache 58

IV. The Mysterious Footprints 79

V. The Case of the Tattooed Men 102

VI. The Man Who Bred Cats 127

VII. In the Séance Room 157

VIII. The 'Happy Death' 182

IX. The Passing of the Euthanasia 211

X. The Bessarabo Mystery 231

XI. The Vendetta 249

XII. The Devil's Telephone 273

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Author and Inspector Louys Disguised as Apaches while on Duty *Frontispiece*

The Weapon that Made a Wound like One Made by the Kick of a Horse 24

Dr. Bougrat in the Dock 76

Police Guarding Approaches to Hotel Malher after the Fight 120

The Imprint of Marinetti's Bloodstained Hand on the Shirt-Front of Janos 162

The Knife Found Buried in the Heart of Janos 162

James P. Bannister 186

Angelo Ferrari 270

The Body of the Murdered Concepcion 270

Mme. de Verneuil 282

M. de Verneuil 282

The Devil's Telephone 282

THE THRILL OF EVIL

* * *

EPISODE I

KIKI: A TALE OF HANOI SHAN, THE SPIDER

No criminal plot was ever yet evolved in which some little detail was not overlooked. The science of detection reposes on the discovery of that oversight. This rule is justified by those characteristics which I have always found present in the criminal mentality, a puerile and arrogant vanity and an habitual underrating of the forces fighting for law and order. No crime would ever be committed if the offender did not imagine himself to be far cleverer than the investigator.

In the schemes conceived by that extraordinary, subtle, remorseless Oriental, Hanoi Shan, little was left to chance; nevertheless, chance seemed ever to fight on our side. Perhaps also Shan, like many others, forgot to reckon with the human weaknesses of his men. In the following story a queer love for a dog, amazing as it may sound, brought the cruel apache, Raoul Ladoux, one of Shan's associates, under the avenging blade of the guillotine.

One morning M. Dufresne of the Paris Sûreté said to me:

'Have you been to the Folies Bergère lately, mon ami?'

I looked up, startled at such a question from my chief.

'No; I don't often go there. I don't like revues. Why, monsieur?'

'I was wondering if you had seen the acrobatic dancer, La Belle Lisette.'

'Oh, yes,' I replied. 'I saw her some weeks ago. She had a partner then.'

'C'est ça! Now she dances alone. Well, what did you think of her?'

'A slim, handsome woman; her dances were wild and savage. She looked more like a Russian than a Frenchwoman. I should think she is utterly heartless.'

M. Dufresne nodded.

'The public hissed her off the stage last night. I hear they are beginning to give her an ugly nickname. Something evil apparently happens to all her admirers. You remember there was M. Valorbe, the painter? It was his influence and money which brought the dancer to the front. No one knows her origin, but she suddenly became notorious about six months ago as the model who sat for his famous picture, "Madame du Barry." Then the Scala engaged her to dance in a revue. Those wild dances which she invented pleased the public but it was the painter's influence which really made her a star. Valorbe died mysteriously, and rumour whispers that the dancer had a hand in his death. We failed to convince the magistrate that it was a crime, although a very large sum of money which Valorbe had received from his notary two days previous to his death was missing and has never been traced. Now, to-day, M. Chapalle, the banker who was known to have aspired to win the dancer's regard, has been found dead. This time it is murder. *Un crime crapuleux!* An ugly crime! I am going out to his little house at Auteuil at once. You had better come along.'

I sprang to my feet and seized my hat. 'Shall I bring my cameras and tools?' I asked.

'Yes, of course, although Rousseau, who is out there, will be annoyed. He is in his element when investigating a crime which appears to be the work of apaches. No doubt by now he will have consumed several litres of pinard and at least one bottle of cognac,' and my chief laughed.

We all liked and even admired the old soldier. A true child of the Paris slums, Inspector Rousseau — known as the Brigadier because his red nose and fierce, bristling moustache made him look like a comic gendarme — had worked his way up to a position of trust by dogged perseverance. He affected to sneer at modern scientific methods — laughed at finger-prints and chemical analysis — and relied on his extraordinary knowledge of the Paris underworld to find his man. Strangely enough, he often succeeded where all our science failed. Once the Brigadier started, nose down on a trail, he would vanish sometimes for weeks, until one day he would appear again unexpectedly with inflamed nose and untidy clothes, and haul his prey to the cells, reporting laconically:

'Chief, I've got him! But it cost me a round fifty bottles.'

From past experience I knew, as did every member of the Sûreté, that this was all a pose. Truly he drank — but he saw to it that those he suspected drank more; and in secret Rousseau used every new trick invented by M. Bertillon.

Rousseau met us at the door of the Villa Medici, where the crime had been committed. Saluting M. Dufresne, he led the way to a large salon. Never had I seen such a weird room. The walls, windows, and door

were draped with crimson velvet. The furniture was upholstered and painted to match them; even the glass in the large French window was red, and the thick carpet was the same fantastic colour. The effect produced was truly horrible. I could not repress a shiver of fear when, following the direction of Rousseau's pointing hand, I saw the figure of an elderly man sitting stiffly erect in a scarlet armchair. A blood-red mist appeared to surround him as a ray of sunlight, passing through the ruby glass, struck full on the lifeless, distorted face.

'For Heaven's sake, open that window,' M. Dufresne gasped. 'I feel as though I were wading through blood.' But even the sunlight did little to dispel the feeling of nausea which had seized on us. We saw that the murdered man was dressed in pyjamas and silk dressing-gown of the same revolting hue. His hands and feet were bound to the chair, and from his left side protruded the handle of a *lingue* (an apache knife). M. Dufresne walked quickly over to the gruesome figure.

'He was stabbed?' he queried.

'Mais oui, monsieur,' the Brigadier replied. 'But after he was dead.'

'Why, surely it was the knife that killed him?'

'Oh, no; look — if you examine the wound you'll see that there is not a drop of blood. Look at his eyes' — and the Brigadier lifted an eyelid. 'Pin-point pupils and a congested face. Poison, I imagine.'

'Then why the knife?'

'Ah, that, monsieur' — and Rousseau shrugged his shoulders with exaggerated emphasis — 'probably a blind.'

'What have you found?' M. Dufresne snapped nervously.

'Many things, monsieur. There was a party here last

night. About fourteen guests. All well-known people. It did not end until near dawn ——'

'How do you know?'

'When I came this morning — an hour after the discovery of the crime by Sergeant Dubois, who was attracted by the frantic barking of a dog — I found the rooms hazy with cigar-smoke which had not settled. That was at seven o'clock, and day breaks about six. Also there were many half-empty champagne bottles on the table. I sampled them, and the wine was still sparkling. Furthermore, Sergeant Dubois reports that groups of noisy men and women in evening dress drove away just before the dog began to bark and howl.'

M. Dufresne nodded. 'Proceed, mon ami.'

'I found no one in the place; even the dog had disappeared; I imagine it to have been a small white animal with black spots ——'

M. Dufresne raised his eyebrows.

'—— It had lain for some time curled up in an armchair; therefore it could not be very large, and I have some of the hairs.'

Little did we guess the all-important part the dog was afterwards to play.

'But what made you report that it was an apache crime? Except for that knife ——'

'True, monsieur, but at first I was deceived. Even now I believe that the crime was carried out by ruffians, although it was probably not conceived by them. Shall I continue?'

'But yes, go on.'

'You see, the poor fellow had been — well — persuaded — to open his own safe. It is in the next room. I found a complete outfit of burglar's tools in front of it. The thieves must have worked for some time, but they

failed to open the door. They then forced M. Chapalle to disclose the combination. These burns ——'

'Don't, Rousseau! I see — poor fellow.'

'That was why they killed him. One at least of the gang was known to him ——'

'Ah, you think that the woman ——?'

'Yes, she drugged him to give her accomplices time to force the safe. When they failed, other means were used. I have the names of some of the guests. They had invitations, and several of these I found on a tray in the hall.'

'That looks as though it had been done purposely.'

'I think so, too, for they are well-known people — quite above suspicion. You'll see. They will testify that La Belle Lisette left with them — an alibi.'

'How do you know that she was here?'

'I *don't* know — but the party was in the nature of a Bacchanal. A girl danced with bare feet on the big dining-table among the dishes and wine-glasses. Her feet were wet with wine and have left clear imprints on the polished wood. Now I come to the strangest thing of all — look,' and Rousseau pointed to a folded napkin on a side table. M. Dufresne opened it quickly and gave a cry of surprise. In the linen was a small white dove. Its head had been wrenched off and was lying beside it.

'What the devil does that mean?' M. Dufresne asked. In answer, Rousseau picked up a soft, clinging robe of white silk, which had been thrown carelessly behind a chair. It was shaped like a Greek chlamys, and the front and back were drenched with blood.

'I said that wicked things happened here last night. You will find that this blood is from the dove. I heard of such dances when I was in the East. It explains the scarlet room and the presence of drugs in several wine-

glasses. No doubt the whole thing was suggested by this Lisette.'

'Good Lord!' I exclaimed. 'Yes, I've heard of this "dance of the dying dove" also. But where would such a girl as La Belle Lisette get the idea from — and why ——?'

'Well, it acts hypnotically, I've been told, doesn't it?' Rousseau said thoughtfully. 'The red room, the whirling white dress, the blood — some devilish scheme which went wrong, I imagine, making murder necessary.'

'Rubbish, Brigadier! You are imagining things. What about that burglar's outfit? That's commonplace enough. The doctor and the magistrate will be here in a moment. Then we'll get down to facts. The main thing to remember is that a man has been killed.'

When the *juge d'instruction* arrived, he also impatiently waved aside all Rousseau's theories.

'First, the names of the guests,' he snapped. 'See that they all attend at my office to-night. You, Rousseau, find out from where and by whom the viands were brought and whether a servant admitted the guests. Those people must be brought before me. Post a couple of your men to watch this dancer and find out if she possesses a dog such as you describe. Let me have your report, doctor. I must know immediately how M. Chapalle died.'

These sharp, matter-of-fact orders brought us to our senses again, for I admit that, since entering that terrible room, we had all fallen under an evil spell.

Startling news awaited us that evening at headquarters. M. Chapalle had succumbed to morphine poisoning. Rousseau was right; he had been stabbed when already dead. The horrified guests, men and women of the best society, were unanimous in declaring that their host was

quite cheerful, although very drowsy, when they left, but this they had put down to the wine. La Belle Lisette had been the guest of honour and danced for them. But *she had remained* when they withdrew. Two other important facts were disclosed by the investigation: M. Chapalle had displayed a wonderful diamond necklace during the evening which was intended as a wedding gift to his daughter. Furthermore, we discovered that he had realised nearly half a million francs the day before, and this money had been brought by a bank messenger to the Villa Medici. Both the money and the necklace had disappeared.

A warrant was at once issued for the arrest of the dancer, but it came too late. When the police, receiving no reply to their knocking, forced the door of her flat, they found the place untenanted and in wild disorder. On the dressing-table was a letter addressed to the police. In it, La Belle Lisette confessed that she had killed M. Chapalle in a fit of jealous rage, because money and necklace were intended for a rival. She ended by stating that it was her intention to commit suicide.

You will find me in the Seine [the letter concluded]. The diamonds and money shall never go to another.

A frantic search for the girl was immediately organised, for the police believed the letter to be a ruse. But two days later, her body was recovered from the river. A blow, which might have been made by a ship's propeller, had so disfigured her that identification was difficult, but fellow artistes recognised the dress and trinkets. Furthermore, a small blue star which was tattooed on the left hand had been noticed and commented on by her friends. They all declared that it was La Belle Lisette, and the police had perforce to be content.

The Seine was dragged and divers searched in vain for the money and diamonds — nothing was found. It was a most disappointing case. What happened in that scarlet room was a mystery which we despaired of solving. Thread after thread snapped. The elderly waiter who had served the cold dishes ordered by M. Chapalle from a Paris *traiteur* proved conclusively that he left before the drinking began. The servant who admitted the guests was a chauffeur lent for the occasion by one of the dead man's friends. M. Chapalle had kept no servants at Auteuil. There remained only the dog which had given the alarm. We discovered that the dancer had possessed a small black-and-white sheep-dog named Kiki, but it had not been seen since her death. We hoped that by tracing the animal, if it still lived, we might find the accomplices who had attempted to break open the safe in the Villa Medici. Rousseau was convinced that the burglar's outfit, which had probably been forgotten because of the unexpected arrival of the policeman Dubois, belonged to skilled house-breakers.

Our investigation at last led us to an evil restaurant in Auteuil, the Café des Amis. It was the meeting-place of all the riff-raff of the suburbs, and the owner — a ruffian named Julot — had already served several sentences for robbery. His wife, a bad-tempered creature nicknamed 'La Frangine' ('The Pal'), was well known to the police. Two of the husband's friends, villainous apaches both, and known as 'Nenesse' and 'Toto,' were just the type of men who would commit such a crime as that horror at the Villa Medici, but we had as yet no proof of their complicity.

Rousseau was still spending most of his time in and near the Café des Amis when the mysterious death of Baron de Zeidler startled all Paris.

The Baron had been famous for his race-horses. One of them, a thoroughbred mare named Mariposa, was entered for the forthcoming annual Grand Prix. Rich and idle, Baron de Zeidler had spent much of his time and money in collecting historic gems. Although a married man, his weakness for the fair sex was well known and had been frequently commented upon in the press. A telephone message informed the police that the unfortunate baron had been found lying with a fractured skull in the box of his favourite horse.

'Another former friend of La Belle Lisette,' grunted M. Dufresne, when the news arrived at the Sûreté headquarters. 'Even after her death the curse seems still to be active. I wonder ——'

At this moment the door opened and Rousseau entered. Saluting his chief he turned to me.

'M. Bertillon wishes you to come at once. We are going to Saint-Cloud.'

M. Dufresne nodded approvingly.

'Of course,' he said, 'this baron was a great friend of M. Bertillon. I am glad he is going to investigate. Let me have your report when you return.'

Les Peupliers — the country house of the dead man — was a grey old building standing in the middle of a spacious park, one part of which was set aside for the stables and training fields.

At our arrival a servant conducted us at once to the Baroness. She it was who had telephoned to M. Bertillon begging him to come and investigate in person. The Baroness was a tall, dark woman with rather an aggressive manner; a handsome woman, indeed, but there was something vulgar and insincere about her which grated on the nerves. I was surprised to learn that she was an American, for I had thought her to be from the South of

France. Her account of the discovery was brief: one of the jockeys who had gone to Mariposa's box had been horrified to see his master lying at full length, face downwards, just behind the horse. He had seen at once that the Baron was dead and had therefore not moved the body, but had led the mare into another part of the stable to prevent her from trampling on the unfortunate man.

'I have been absent for some days,' the Baroness concluded. 'When I returned this morning, I was quite overcome by the terrible news. I am sure it is not an accident. My husband was half horse himself. Voyons — a Hungarian, brought up from childhood among horses — is it likely that he would be killed by his favourite animal? No, no; I feel sure a vile and brutal crime has been committed.'

'Nothing has been touched, madame?' M. Bertillon asked.

'Nothing, monsieur. The gendarmes were called, of course; but when I informed them that you were coming, they merely mounted guard over the house and the stables. I felt sure you would come in person, since my poor husband was your friend.'

'Naturally, madame. Now, with your permission, we will go to the stables.'

We crossed a paddock and saw a burly country policeman standing stiffly before the door of one of the boxes. Just inside, sprawling on its face, was the body. It was evident that the Baron had met his death at some time on the preceding evening, for he was wearing a dinner jacket. Near his outstretched hand was a half-smoked cigar.

Rousseau and I watched breathlessly while the great criminologist examined the ground. The wound, which

had bled much, appeared to puzzle him. For a long time he remained deep in thought, studying the stark figure.

At last he said to me: 'Get your camera ready and take several photographs from above and from the door. Then join me outside.'

I had barely finished when M. Bertillon called to me excitedly. I found him examining the race-horse which had occupied the compartment where the Baron lay.

'Come here, mon ami,' said my chief, when I appeared; 'you are about the same height as my poor friend. I wish to see where the mare's hoofs would strike you if she kicked.'

Rousseau grinned. 'I am glad I am not tall enough, Chief,' he murmured.

Whilst two men held the horse some distance from me, we attempted in vain to make her lash out, but the animal appeared to be singularly good-tempered. Again M. Bertillon stood long minutes in silence, his eyes fixed in a vacant stare on the mare. Abruptly he struck his hand with clenched fist.

'Nom d'un chien, that's it!' he cried. 'I know there was something queer about that wound. It's murder, right enough. What a clever plot! Thank Heaven, that, as usual, it was just not clever enough.'

'Murder?' queried Rousseau, 'but how? Surely his horse killed him.'

'Come to the stable and I'll explain.'

When we were alone in the sinister compartment, M. Bertillon stooped down and pointed to the clear marks of horseshoes on the face and neck of the dead man.

'Examine these weals and tell me what is wrong.'

We stared anxiously, but could not see what our chief meant.

'You don't see it? No, neither did I at first. Yet you

are both horsemen. Tell me, how does a horse kick? I mean, which end of the shoe would strike hardest and first?'

'Why, the rounded end, naturally.'

'Just so! And — does a horse kick upwards or downwards?'

'Upwards, of course ——'

'Now look at these wounds, and learn to use your eyes. You see — the round part of a horseshoe has penetrated deeply into the skull, but it is the *wrong way up*. It was made by a downward blow and not by an upward kick. Besides, no horse, except perhaps a wild stallion, could kick so high. Furthermore, look at the size of the marks. The shoe that made these wounds was that of a heavy saddle-horse. You noticed how slender, light, and beautifully made were the shoes of the race-horse. The jockey told me that they weigh scarcely five ounces each, whereas the ordinary hunter's shoe weighs fourteen ounces. No — the mare did not make those wounds.'

'Name of a dog!' Rousseau exclaimed admiringly. 'That's clever work, Chief. Wonderful! Who killed the man, then ——?'

M. Bertillon smiled indulgently, pleased by the praise.

'I use my eyes, mes enfants, but I'm no wizard. I feel sure my poor friend was murdered, but how I don't know yet nor by whom. That is the next step. Let us examine and photograph the ground outside. Then we will go to the house. A great pity that a cigar will not show finger-prints. I feel sure the cigar-stump was placed there deliberately as a blind. Rousseau, telephone to Dr. Arnauld and ask him to come at once to examine the body, and tell the gendarme not to allow anyone to enter here.'

The ground outside was brick-paved and helped us

very little, but, just as we were about to go, my chief pointed excitedly to a dark stain at the extreme end of the path. A rapid examination convinced us that it was blood.

'This is where the man was killed, and he was then dragged or carried into the stable. There must have been several men, unless the murderer was exceptionally powerful, for my poor friend was no light-weight.'

The Baroness was waiting for us when we reached the house. Looking her squarely in the eyes, M. Bertillon said slowly:

'You were right, madame — poor de Zeidler has been murdered.' The woman became deadly pale, her eyes dilated with fear, and with both hands pressed tightly over her heart she sank down on a chair. Slowly a dull red crept to her cheeks under the stony stare of my chief. I had a feeling that he suspected her. Finally shifting his hostile gaze, he continued: 'Those wonderful gems the Baron possessed — where are they kept?'

'In a safe in his study. He alone knew the combination, and the key to an outer steel door was always on his person. The safe was made by Messrs. Mildé to his order. He was very proud of that safe and often boasted that no one could open it.'

Bertillon drew a key from his pocket.

'Is this the key, madame? I found it attached to a gold chain around his neck.'

'Then it must be the one, but it only opens the first door.'

'Thank you. We should like to examine the study and afterwards I will question the servants who were here last night.'

The Baroness rang a bell and a trim, handsome brunette — the parlourmaid, evidently — conducted us to

the dead man's study. As she was about to withdraw, M. Bertillon stopped her.

'You were in the house last night, mademoiselle?' he asked.

'Yes, monsieur,' she replied, dropping a curtsy.

'Was the Baron still in this room when you retired?'

'Yes, monsieur. I did not wait on him, as a rule, but last night August, the valet, was away — it was his free evening — and I served the coffee and cognac here. Master was then reading and smoking.'

'After serving coffee you did not come in again?'

'Non, monsieur. Master said that I need not wait up. I think — I believe ——'

'What? Come, speak out.'

'Well, sir, master sometimes received friends when madame was away. He often admitted them himself. I think someone came last night.'

'Did you see anyone?'

'No, monsieur.'

'Thank you; that is all, then.'

When the girl had withdrawn, Bertillon said musingly: 'Strange; I can't place her. But I've seen that powerful cleft chin before. Now let us look at the safe.'

This was a huge steel box built into the wall. It was really a safe within a safe, for when we had opened the massive door, we saw that inside, surrounded by some fireproof substance, was a second smaller safe. Since we could not open it, Bertillon at once telephoned to the makers to send one of their experts. Pending his arrival, I carefully examined the room, but found nothing unusual. I was about to say so when I saw that my chief was staring fixedly at the coffee-table.

'Look,' he called to me. 'The maid was right. Someone visited the Baron last night.'

I hurried over and saw that he was examining some circular marks on the tray.

'There is the liqueur glass from which he drank, you see. It is quite small, but two larger glasses, wine-glasses probably, have also stood here. Wine was poured into them by an unsteady hand, for some of it was spilled. A sweet Spanish wine, I imagine; it is thick and sticky. Someone removed those glasses. Quick; let us see if they have been hidden in the room.'

We hunted everywhere, but without avail. Our search was not quite futile, however, for near a couch we found a spot that was still damp and smelt of wine. With little regard for the valuable carpet, M. Bertillon cut this out with a sharp knife and placed it carefully in one of our metal carriers.

'Take this to Lebrun at once and let him analyse it. I have seen all I want. I am going to question that maid again and then the other servants. Develop your negatives and have a print of each ready as quickly as possible and bring them to my office. I shall be there as soon as I have obtained Dr. Arnauld's report.'

I had barely completed my work when the telephone shrilled and my chief's voice summoned me. I found Lebrun, the Sûreté analyst, and Dr. Arnauld already waiting when I entered. A moment later M. Bertillon appeared, and with him, to my delight, I saw Bannister, the American detective. We greeted each other warmly, for we were great friends.

Noting my surprise, M. Bertillon said: 'I have requested your friend to obtain certain information for me from his New York office. Sit down, gentlemen, and let us go into this matter. First, your report, doctor.'

'Here it is,' Dr. Arnauld said. 'Baron de Zeidler died from cerebral hemorrhage caused by a blow or a kick

which fractured the base of the skull. The wound is crescent-shaped and inclines me to believe that a horse kicked him, perhaps because he stumbled against the animal. I mention this because I have discovered traces of morphine poisoning. The man was in a stupefied condition before he was killed. You will find the details here,' and he placed several sheets of paper on the table.

'Good! And you, M. Lebrun?'

'The piece of carpet was impregnated with wine — Malaga or Xeres. I also found traces of morphine.'

M. Bertillon nodded.

'Now, M. Bannister, what does the cable from America say?'

'There was no need for a cable. I know all about the Baroness. She is a former Lola Dawson, from Chicago. She became notorious some years ago in New York cabarets. Baron de Zeidler fell in love with her, divorced his first wife, and married Lola.'

'Nothing else?'

'No, nothing of importance. But there were several scandals in New York society because this Lola was believed to have had — well — abnormal tastes.'

'Thank you. Press that bell, please. Rousseau should be here by now.'

A few moments later the Brigadier entered. There was a triumphant twinkle in his eye as he looked us over.

'The little dog again, monsieur,' he said, with a queer smile. 'After you left, the maid Françoise drove away in a cab and with her went a dog which she had always kept. It was the dog which had belonged to La Belle Lisette!'

'What! And you let her get away?' M. Bertillon shouted furiously.

Rousseau started back indignantly. 'But surely mon-

sieur knows me better. I followed the cab to the Point du Jour gate, where it was dismissed. The young lady then entered a car which had been waiting and drove to the Gare du Nord. An hour later a nice elegant young man, who had taken a suburban train, returned to the Gare du Nord by another line. He was carrying a small suitcase in which was the beautiful hair and the dress of the maid Françoise. If only the little dog had not been with him, and if I had not seen him undress and take off his wig through the little glass window in the railway carriage, I should have been nicely fooled ——'

'Nom d'un chien! Then Françoise ——'

'Françoise is a young man of very bad antecedents — he is an apache named Raoul Ladoux.'

'Good Heavens! I wonder if La Belle Lisette ——'

'Oh, without a doubt, monsieur. This young man changes into a beautiful woman whenever he pleases. The body in the Seine was not that of La Belle.'

Bertillon thumped the table violently. 'Great Heavens! Here am I the inventor of the *portrait parlé*, and I don't apply my own system. *Fossette* — messieurs, that cleft chin of his is classified as *fossette*! I felt sure I knew the chin, yet I failed to recognise it. What a wonderful actor the fellow must be. Where did you leave him?'

'Downstairs in the cells, monsieur. He drove to the Café des Amis — it all fits in; left again minus bag and dog, and walked to the tramway, and here he is now in cell 14, after nearly knifing me. He is very indignant and demands to know why he is arrested. I didn't tell him.'

'Bravo, Rousseau, well done! And the Café des Amis ——?'

'Two energetic officers dressed as workmen who don't want work are watching it — drinking there and generally keeping dear Julot and his handsome wife busy.

But that is not all. When I searched Ladoux, who, as you know, is already wanted by us for several little exploits with the Pegomas bandits — murder and so forth — I found a little note. He tried to swallow it; but I choked him until he coughed it up — here it is.'

We eagerly bent over the dirty scrap of paper; on it were only two words, '*Viens demain*' ('Come to-morrow'), and under them a crude drawing of a — spider.

'Good God!' yelled Bannister. 'The Spider, Hanoi Shan! That explains everything. Only his cunning brain could have conceived such a plot.'

I gasped — as did M. Bertillon. We looked at each other, awestruck, for a long minute.

Then our chief said angrily: 'Allons donc! Nonsense — the Spider is dead, or if not, he has left France long ago. Where could he have hidden since the murder of Van Bromen — a monster like that?'

Rousseau shrugged his shoulders. 'Anywhere — he is a spider. He lies hidden whilst others do his work. That's why, when I found that little message, I had the café surrounded and said nothing to *Mademoiselle* Raoul Ladoux. We must let him and his friends lead us to Shan.'

'He is a man, this apache, I take it — not ——'

'Oh, no, monsieur, a man — or a devil if you like — cruel and deadly, but very handsome — small hands and feet and muscles of steel. A treacherous beast with many murders to his account.'

M. Bertillon chewed his pen thoughtfully for a while. Then he said:

'I nearly applied for a warrant against the Baroness. Now I see that she had nothing to do with this crime. It is that cunning Oriental and his female impersonator. What a devilish scheme! I don't see *yet* how they killed

the Baron, but probably the apache, in the rôle of a fascinating lady's-maid, first drugged him and then — then — I don't know,' and Bertillon threw out his hands with a gesture of despair. 'We shall know soon,' he continued. 'Have the fellow removed to the dépôt. We must run no risks; let him have what he wants: food, paper, pencil, but watch him night and day. If he writes letters, all the better; every scrap that leaves his cell must be taken to the laboratory. Don't let him suspect he is watched, and withdraw your men from the café. Only Colbert and yourself must watch that place. A false step would ruin everything. I am almost sorry you arrested Ladoux. Perhaps we shall release him. At all costs we must get that fiendish Oriental this time.'

'And the jewels?' I asked curiously.

'Oh, the safe was empty, of course. A woman looking like the Baroness has already tried to sell one of the Bourbon rubies. Delavoye, the jeweller, 'phoned an hour ago. The woman got away, but it was not the Baroness. She is being watched. Obviously they wished to make us believe that she is an accomplice. Shan has made several bad mistakes this time. His brain must be degenerating.'

Bannister laughed. 'His brain is not failing, Chief, but his men make mistakes. The dog has been his undoing in this case. I dare say he knows nothing about that. He never operates in person.'

Two days passed in anxious waiting; Ladoux spent his time reading and sleeping and showed no desire to communicate with the outside world. On the evening of the second day, Rousseau brought a sheet of paper to the laboratory.

'I wonder if this contains more than just his menu,' he said laconically, flipping it across to me.

It was a sheet of stiff paper on which was a typed list of dishes for the prisoner's meals. These were sent in from a neighbouring restaurant at the request of the apache. I examined the paper closely.

'I see he has marked the food to be sent with a cross and written "Two raw onions" underneath,' I remarked.

'Yes, he has onions every day.'

'Strange, isn't it — raw onions?'

'Oh, no; these fellows all like onions or garlic.'

Without answering, I carried the paper to a Bunsen flame, over which I placed a polished plate of steel. When it was hot, I passed this backward and forward over the paper, pressing it down gently.

Rousseau gave a shout of delight. A moment before the back of the menu had been a complete blank. Under the influence of the hot plate, a faint tracing was now visible. Thus encouraged, I prepared a liquid known to chemists as iglycal, made with aluminium chloride. This I dabbed over the parts where the tracing had appeared. Instantly a message the colour of rust became visible, and we read:

The police have got me. Warn the Spider. Hide the stones. They'll get nothing from me. They know about the Baron. Tell the Spider to hide in the caveau. Give Loletta money for my lawyer. Please feed Kiki — and let him exercise. He is in the cellar. The café is suspected.

La Mome
[Apache slang for girl.]

'That was why he wanted raw onions. This has been written with onion juice. Milk would have served equally well, had he known. When is this to be delivered?'

'To-night. It's for to-morrow's food.'

'Very well, I'll tell M. Bertillon. In an hour this writing will be invisible again. Then you can send the menu to the restaurant. Don't let it pass out of your sight; we must know who takes it to the Spider, and follow him.'

An hour later Dufresne, Bannister, and I, well armed and flanked by a dozen detectives, were ready to follow the messenger. We had waited but a short time when Rousseau, who was dressed as a cabman — a disguise which suited him — came out of the restaurant near the prison and climbed on his box. Shortly afterwards one of the waitresses appeared and, to our joy, hailed the cab Rousseau was driving. As Rousseau whipped up his horse, we saw a scrap of paper flutter to the ground. Picking it up, I read 'Café des Amis.' There was no need for us to follow. Instead, we separated and gained the neighbourhood of the sinister wine-shop half an hour before the messenger drove up in the old cab. The ruffian Julot came to the door and we saw the girl hand him the menu. Then Julot paid Rousseau, who, true to type, grumbled and argued and finally insisted on receiving a bottle of wine as pourboire. It was a good move and we knew that the astute old fellow would signal to us the moment we were needed.

Several men with guns had been placed in a ditch commanding the road leading to the café, others lounged about the neighbourhood. With fast-beating hearts we watched and waited.

Abruptly we heard angry shouts proceeding from the large taproom, the door was flung wide, and several rough characters came tumbling out. We dashed in at once. Rousseau was standing in the doorway leading to the kitchen, revolver in hand, menacing several men who were snarling and spitting with rage. In a moment our

fellows had them securely bound. Meanwhile, Rousseau had turned and rushed down the passage and we heard his voice calling to us.

We found him struggling with the husband, Julot, who had been about to climb into an opening in the floor, disclosed by the displacement of the kitchen range. When we appeared, he pulled out a pistol and fired three shots in quick succession down the hole.

'Quick,' Dufresne yelled, 'that's a signal — in with you.' We scrambled hurriedly down a crazy wooden ladder and found ourselves in a wide, smooth tunnel sloping gently downwards. In the distance lights flashed and raucous voices screamed and yelled.

'*Les flics!*' we heard. '*Sauve qui peut!*'

Several shots whistled past us and one of our men dropped. We at once fired a volley in return and stumbled forward at a run. The underground passage was nearly half a mile long, and several times we saw fleeing shapes disappearing up small runways. Some of the officers followed these, whilst we kept straight on. Bannister was some distance ahead when we heard him shout, 'The Spider! Back to the river — he's off by boat.' But we failed to understand the warning, and rushed forward.

A moment later we came to where the American stood panting. Before us was the Seine, its muddy waters swirling around our legs. The tunnel, probably an ancient sewer, connected the café with the river-bank. Telephone messages were immediately sent, warning the police up and down stream to look out for a launch containing an Oriental. Unfortunately, Bannister had only dimly seen the boat and could give no description. He had been attracted by the roar of a powerful engine, but when he raced to the spot from where the sound had

come, the boat was disappearing in the distance. For the moment there was nothing else to do but wait for the river police.

Meanwhile, we explored the tunnel. We found the Spider's retreat in a passage leading to a large chamber which was guarded by a stout wooden door. It was well furnished and contained a comfortable bed. On the table were several empty jewel-cases and a telephone extension to the café above. To our joy we saw that a small safe in one corner was still closed. In it were most of the jewels stolen from the Baron de Zeidler. But our best find was a stout piece of wood shaped like a club to which two horseshoes had been fastened with wire. It was lying on the Spider's bed.

'That is the weapon which killed the Baron,' said Dufresne. 'M. Bertillon will be pleased. Ingenious, is it not? But they should have chosen racing shoes instead of this heavy type, and the murderer should have struck upwards, as a horse kicks.'

We were about to go when Bannister, who was examining the place minutely, pointed out that, although the chamber was well furnished, even to a thick carpet, there was no means of illuminating it. The only lamp we found was a photographer's ruby safe-light. We came to the conclusion that the foul creature who had lived there was so entirely accustomed to the dark that daylight or even ordinary lamplight was painful to his eyes. We remembered how luminous his eyes had appeared on that night in the Hôtel d'Amsterdam [1] when we had faced him for the first time.

Although the Spider had again escaped, we felt confident that it would not be for long. Meanwhile we had

[1] 'The Suicide Room,' *Warped in the Making*. Houghton Mifflin Company.

THE WEAPON THAT MADE A WOUND LIKE ONE MADE BY THE KICK OF A HORSE

captured a number of apaches, all wanted for various crimes, besides the infamous shrew who owned the inn, and her pretty trio, Julot, Nenesse, and Toto.

We stationed several men in the tunnel in case Shan returned for the jewels, and then ascended to the café. Here we were greeted with the shrill whining of a dog which had been locked in a back room. It was Kiki, the small black-and-white sheep-dog who had unwittingly brought all Hanoi Shan's schemes to naught. M. Dufresne ordered the animal to be taken to headquarters.

Police launches explored both banks of the Seine all night, for miles, but in vain. There were too many hiding-places which Shan could make use of. Galling as it was, we knew, when dawn came and the telephone was still silent, that the Spider was yet free.

The next day Raoul Ladoux was brought before the *juge d'instruction*. At first he denied everything, but when the accumulated evidence was placed before him — horseshoe club, finger-prints of La Belle Lisette (which were replicas of his own), the secret message on the menu, and the wig which he had worn as Françoise the maid — he stammered helplessly and at last gave way and related the whole story:

Shan, whose loathsome brain ever yearned for cruelty and bloodshed, but whose eyes, through slow, inevitable atrophy of the nervous system, had become so sensitive that white light of any kind was torture, had taken refuge, since the capture of so many of his men, in the underground chamber. There he had conceived the idea of disguising Raoul Ladoux as a woman. No doubt the small regular features and beautiful eyes of the apache had suggested the scheme. Ladoux was a foundling, we discovered. Heaven alone knows who the father was,

but the son was undoubtedly a throwback to some aristocratic ancestor. His success as a dancer gave Shan the opportunity of obtaining the jewels his evil soul loved and of satisfying his craving for inhuman orgies. The scarlet room in the Villa Medici had been his suggestion. M. Chapalle, madly enamoured of La Belle Lisette, had gladly carried out her wishes, and had allowed her to arrange everything, believing that he was to witness a novel dance. Shan had crept out of his hole and watched the 'dance of the dying dove' which ended in the death of the poor financier and the theft of his money and diamonds.

When spies warned Raoul that the police suspected La Belle Lisette, the apache had staged the suicide and simply assumed his real sex once more. I prefer not to relate how the poor drowned girl was obtained. A description of the famous gems of Baron de Zeidler had then aroused the greed of the Spider. The Baron's horses gave Shan the idea of the club, but for once his cunning brain had failed to visualise the result. The Baron had been completely deceived by the apache, who had entered his service disguised as a trim lady's-maid, and during his wife's absence he had invited Françoise to drink with him. The apache had immediately seized the opportunity and drugged the wine. Intoxicated by the poisoned wine and off his guard, the Baron had unfortunately displayed his collection of gems to Françoise. When the Baron turned to place them in the safe again, Ladoux had stunned him, dragged him to the stables, and killed him with the horseshoe club.

The apaches captured at the Café des Amis were sent to Noumea for life for their complicity in the crime at the Villa Medici. The burglar's outfit was proved to have belonged to Julot.

Raoul Ladoux was guillotined in October, 1908. His crimes were so many and so gruesome that his counsel's plea for mercy was greeted with yells and shouts from everyone in court.

Kiki became a great favourite at headquarters, and was adopted by Rousseau.

EPISODE II

THE MAN WITH THE SIX TOES

It is strange how certain districts and even certain streets which have once acquired a sinister reputation attract criminals, just as the spot where a crime has been perpetrated exerts an uncanny fascination upon the creature who committed it.

The rue de Charenton first became notorious because the bandit Cartouche made it his hunting-ground. The curious traveller may still visit an old building bearing the number 302, where this French Dick Turpin caroused with his fellows; even the old well with its double underground exit is still there. In that same street is the 'Passage de la Grande Pinte,' which for a long time was the meeting-place and headquarters of the loathsome Pedro la Marra and his evil band.

Through the dirty window of the Lapin Blanc I could see my colleague, Inspector Louys, sitting tilted comfortably back in a wicker chair close to an iron stove in which a great fire was crackling. Near his hand was a *saladier* of hot wine, and a daily paper was open on his lap. But in truth he was not reading; his apparently sleepy gaze was fixed on the glazed door leading into a mysterious back room which we believed to be the lair of the men we sought. I envied him the warmth and the blue liquid in the bowl, for I was cold and tired. Dressed in ragged, filthy clothes, I had slouched up and down the rue de Charenton for several dreary days, acting the part of an apache of the solitary type; one who has only recently passed through the massive gates of a prison, and is

seeking to chum up again with a gang. The weather was cold and drizzly, and the bitter wind whistled through my rags and searched out every sensitive nerve. The rue de Charenton is a horrible street; a relic of the past, typical of Old Paris. By day it is noisy with the shrieking, rattling trains of the Mediterranean service which rumble past just behind the crumbling houses, and carry wine, oil, and fruit to the ever-hungry, thirsty metropolis. Lorries loaded with huge vats bump and crash along over the ancient cobbles in one unending stream, and from the rue de Cognac comes the sickening stench of stale spirits. At night it is even worse, for then the gloom is alive with slinking shapes of men and women; creatures of crime and violence, who flit silently by in the shadows or elbow their way in and out of the noisome taverns. One feels that all are potential killers; pregnant with hatred, their sneering lips quivering with snarling blasphemy, and every muscle taut for instant action. I knew from experience that a chance word or a curious glance might cause an explosion, as the click of the trigger explodes a shell.

It was my first taste of spade work, the lot of every French detective, and I cursed the love for excitement which had led me to abandon the cosy laboratories for this dreary work.

It was a puzzling crime which had brought me there.

A week before, the well-known actress Elena had mysteriously disappeared from her flat in the rue Vallais.

The maid had taken a morning cup of coffee upstairs at the usual hour; since she received no reply to her insistent knocking, she had tried to call her mistress to the private telephone. Becoming alarmed at the prolonged silence, she had then summoned the police. The bed-

room was on the fifth floor, and the French window which led to a small balcony overlooked a park. The door was locked and bolted on the inside and had to be forced. When the detectives finally entered the room, they found the bed half dragged to the floor, but no sign of the actress. A massive safe in which she kept her valuable jewels had been cleverly broken open and was empty. On the carpet near the window lay a short piece of steel, probably part of a knife. This was blood-stained and gave us several finger-prints. Finger-prints were also found on the glass top of a dressing-table, and wedged in the corner of a drawer we discovered a scrap of twisted paper which proved to be a torn bank-note. The laboratory report stated that the note was counterfeit and the finger-prints were identified. They belonged to a man whom we believed to be a member of the gang who were printing and passing quantities of counterfeit ten-pound and one-thousand-franc notes. Inconceivable as it appeared, someone had either scaled the smooth perpendicular walls of the house, or had descended from the sloping roof, entering through the window, which the actress always left open at night. What had become of Mademoiselle Elena no one could say. There were only two possible solutions to the mystery. Either she had been hurled from the balcony into the park, or she had been dragged to the roof by a rope and carried away; yet the only mark to support either theory which we discovered was a strange pattern composed of six oval impressions, very like that which clutching finger-tips would leave. These were found on the edge of the balcony. They were treated with powdered white-lead in the usual manner, but did not reveal the tracery of lines and ridges always present on finger-prints, nor could we account for the sixth imprint. Although the police

worked ceaselessly, Mademoiselle Elena had completely disappeared. A thumb-mark on the torn bank-note was also identified, but there again the Sûreté were baffled, for the chart which the records sent to M. Dufresne bore the name 'Félipe José, Spaniard. Sentenced to transportation for life. Crime, forgery'; and across the chart was the official stamp — 'Died in Cayenne.' Nevertheless, M. Bertillon believed that the thumb-print was that of Félipe, and that another convict had been cleverly substituted for this Félipe, giving the latter the chance to escape. All our energies were therefore concentrated on running to earth the gang who were passing the counterfeit notes, in the hope that thus we should clear up the mystery of the empty bedroom. Already some progress had been made, for we had discovered that men who moved in good society were in close touch with the criminals whose traces we had found. Somewhere in the circle we had drawn around the rue de Charenton the bogus bank-notes were being printed. Information received from London led M. Dufresne to believe that we were dealing with an international group, and that the leaders were either English or Americans; hence my coöperation. We hoped that, by watching the scum who carried out the orders of those unknown leaders, we should be able to work up to them.

The day before we had seen a man whom we suspected come out of the room which Inspector Louys was now watching, carrying a large satchel. Our hearts beat fast with hope, for we believed that the bag contained bank-notes. We had followed him to the underground station and were able to enter the same compartment, but he had cleverly evaded us. Suddenly, at the Louvre, when the train was already moving, the fellow pulled the door open and jumped out. Neither Louys nor I had dared to

move, for we guessed that confederates were watching the passengers in order to discover by this trick if detectives were following. Now to-day, in different dress, we were again at the Lapin Blanc.

Suddenly a taxi passed, hooting the prearranged signal — four blasts with an interval. It was the old Brigadier Rousseau. Glancing round, I saw not far away three workmen, carrying tool-bags, coming towards the tavern. I slouched into the taproom and ordered a cup of coffee with rum. Instantly my drowsy colleague awoke, stretched lazily, paid for his wine, and left, crossing the busy street. The three men entered the tavern and ordered drinks. One of them was the man we had already followed. Evidently they were not suspicious of me, but I felt their gaze flicker again and again from my face to my feet. Although I was perfect in every detail, I thought it best to feign a sullen and unfriendly mood, and when one of them offered me a drink, I refused it with an oath and turned my back on him. Snarling insults at once followed, but seeing that I would not reply, they desisted. Another round of drinks went the way of the first, then, handing their apparently innocent bags to the landlord, with the request that he would keep them until the evening, they filed out. It was fortunate that Louys was watching and could follow, for I dared not move — we were dealing with exceptionally sharp criminals. Through the door I saw Rousseau's taxi pass once more, and after a reasonable period I also stepped into the street. To my surprise, I perceived my colleague staring disconsolately about him. When I approached, he pushed open the massive entrance to a house and beckoned to me. One glance was enough. Although in appearance the door was no different from any other, it led, not into a dwelling, but into a long, narrow

alley flanked by small houses and dingy taverns, with numerous runways criss-crossing it. Over the portal, barely legible, were the words: 'Passage de la Grande Pinte.' It was the former haunt of the famous bandit Cartouche, who had often escaped from pursuit through this same passage. Now it had served a modern gang in like manner, and they were no doubt laughing at the ignorant police. Intensely humiliated, we rang up headquarters, for we had been fourteen hours on duty and felt crushed and tired. Then, when Inspector Colbert, dressed in dingy fustian, had taken up his post opposite the tavern, we returned to the Sûreté. M. Dufresne listened to our report in gloomy silence.

'Well — well' — he said, when I had explained how we had been caught — 'I'm not blaming you, but — sacré tonnerre! — have you never heard of the Passage?'

Louys shook his head despondently. 'Even if I had,' he muttered, 'I couldn't be at both ends, and they'd have seen me if I had gone after them through the door.'

'Ça va; go to bed both of you and snatch a few hours' sleep. I'll decide what to do meanwhile. The matter is becoming serious — the disappearance of the actress Elena is being commented upon most sarcastically in the press. No trace of the girl has been found, and I am convinced that only by rounding up this gang shall we clear up the mystery. Don't go home; lie down in the service room; I may need you at any moment.'

It seemed as though I had not slept five minutes before I felt someone shaking me violently, and found Rousseau, still dressed in his chauffeur's uniform, bending over the camp bed.

'Well, mon ami, so you lost the trail, eh? It's lucky the old Brigadier knows Paris. When I saw them go

into the Grande Pinte, I stepped on the accelerator and rattled and bumped round to the other end on two wheels. We've all been fooled. I believe the Lapin Blanc is only a blind. I've discovered their real meeting-place at last. Right at the other end of Paris on top of Montmartre. Hôtel Dulac in the rue Lepic — that's where they went. They came out an hour ago, dressed in evening-clothes. Louys is after them, and has just 'phoned that they are dining at La Chandelle. M. Dufresne wants you to slip into a dinner-jacket and go there. I'll be outside with my taxi to drive you. Sometime during the night we'll raid their place. Do you feel equal to it?'

I jumped up eagerly. It did not take me long to bathe, shave, and dress. It was a delightful sensation to feel clean linen against my body once more, and to be able to wear a warm overcoat. The Brigadier grinned when he saw me, and touched his cap with exaggerated respect.

La Chandelle, a notorious place of amusement in Montmartre, was crowded with the usual medley of foreigners who believe that in these resorts of obvious vice they may gain a glimpse of Paris at play. Frenchmen are rarely seen in restaurants where champagne of very indifferent quality costs ten times the normal price. They know how good wine should taste, and prefer to go where they can obtain it. Our three workmen of the Lapin Blanc were so changed that I hardly recognised them. Dressed expensively and in the latest fashion, they were spending money freely, and a crowd of laughing girls surrounded their table. Several hours passed in tedious waiting, for it was not easy to drink sparingly and yet to pretend to enter into the mad frivolity of the night. Fortunately we had chosen a retired corner, and little notice was taken of us. It was the eternal feminine which attracted the motley crowd to La Chandelle, and

their eyes were glued on the wild can-cans and chaloupées which were danced in the tiny ballroom and amongst the tables. The orchestra played unceasingly, whilst streamers of gaily coloured paper flashed to and fro, entwining waiters and guests alike in a shimmering web. Abruptly I felt a scrap of paper pushed into my hand and saw a young girl dressed as a Columbine dancing past our table. It was a note from the manager requesting me to come to his office. He rose as I entered and pointed to five one-thousand-franc notes, spread out on his desk.

'I have been informed of your investigation,' he said courteously, 'and the Sûreté advised me to examine all notes of large denomination. Can you tell me if these are genuine? They look all right.'

Feigning indifference, I examined the money. We were nearing success at last; the notes were all forged.

'I am afraid, monsieur, that you will have to send them to the laboratory,' I said, handing them back with a bow. 'I cannot tell if they are counterfeit. Who gave them to you?'

'The swarthy man and his two friends. They are the men whom you are watching, I imagine.'

I smiled and shook my head.

'We are not watching anyone, monsieur, but send this money to the *police judiciaire* to-morrow, and leave the rest to us.'

The manager shrugged his shoulders at my caution, but saw that it was useless to insist. When I returned, I found that our three men had risen and were ready to go. Leaving Louys to follow the car they had called, I telephoned my discovery to headquarters, and received orders to go at once to the police station of the rue Tourlac, where my colleagues were gathering for the raid which

was to take place the moment we knew that our quarry had entered the house in the rue Lepic.

The charge-room was crowded. Detectives, cyclists, and a dozen ordinary police were there, smoking and playing cards. The commissaire had not arrived, but in a corner near the telephone M. Dufresne and Rousseau were chatting, whilst from the 'fiddles,' as the cells are picturesquely named, a discordant singing and shouting came in noisy gusts. Rousseau jerked his thumb towards the passage as I approached.

'The violons are full to-night,' he growled, 'but nothing to interest us. We start as soon as Louys telephones. You'd better button your coat. Your dress-shirt is too white — here, wind this scarf around your neck to hide it.'

I was busy arranging the folds over my jacket when the telephone shrilled.

'The rats are in the trap!' said M. Dufresne. 'Come, messieurs — in twos and threes, please. Let the uniformed police go first to close the street at each end.'

Silently we filed out, taking different directions. Dufresne, Rousseau, and I kept together, chatting loudly, as though returning befuddled from some midnight revel. Suddenly I saw the Brigadier dart forward as a dark figure flitted into a doorway. There was an angry squeal, instantly hushed, and we found our friend holding an Algerian carpet-seller firmly by a chain twisted round his wrists — for the French detectives prefer the cabriolet to our handcuffs.

'A spy!' Rousseau exclaimed. 'We're *brulé*' (recognised).

'No, no, m'sieu,' the fellow wailed; 'me Sidi Filoche — sell carpets, no spy.'

Dufresne called two policemen and, despite his protests, the Algerian was led away.

'Lucky we are still some distance from the house, or he would have given the alarm,' said Rousseau. 'I know him — he's been in trouble before. Here we are; this is the place.'

The commissaire rang the bell and we gathered around the door. I saw that it was one of those doubtful hotels, where, in defiance of the regulations, no questions are asked nor any register signed. In reply to our repeated ringing and knocking, the door at last opened a few inches. Instantly several police threw their weight on it and jammed the landlord — a fat, evil-looking fellow — against the wall.

A hand was clapped over his mouth to prevent any outcry; electric torches flashed, and with a rush the police were up the stairs. In a moment every door was guarded and every exit barred. The noise brought the startled inmates, clad in varied and picturesque night-attire, to their doors under the impression that a fight was in progress. Police at once entered the rooms and a thorough search commenced, but nowhere did we see any sign of a printing-press nor of the men we sought. Rousseau raved and threatened, cupboards were opened, walls were tapped — in vain. Another failure, yet somewhere in that house we were convinced the counterfeiters were hidden.

'We'll withdraw as though satisfied,' M. Dufresne whispered, 'and then hide and watch.'

Quickly the order passed from man to man, and we trooped noisily away, followed by the rumbling curses of the landlord and his guests. Now began a tedious wait. Dark corners, doorways, cellar openings — wherever there was room enough, a man was hidden, whilst a

group of cyclist police, almost invisible in their dark uniforms, gathered within sound of our whistles.

I had found an uncomfortable but sheltered post in a doorway. An hour passed, and I was beginning to think that nothing further would happen, and that I could risk a smoke, when abruptly a deep, snarling, booming sound, like the throb of a gigantic gong, ripped brutally through the silence of sleeping Paris. I straightened up in alarm — it was 'La Savoyarde,' the famous bell of the Sacré Cœur, which squats like a gigantic idol at the summit of Montmartre. Six o'clock and dawn was not far off. Close on the last throbbing stroke came a wild, dreadful scream of deadly agony, followed by a squealing, animal laugh and the sharp spang of two pistol-shots. Whistles blew and dark shapes hurtled past me. From the hotel we had raided came a hoarse murmur of frightened voices which rose, sank, and swelled to a babel of noise. With a frenzied rush we were at the door, and sticks and weapons hammered and smashed at the shutters. The minutes seemed hours before we forced an entry. Like a swarm of angry wasps, the police spread out along passages and stairs. As I gained the third landing, I saw the Brigadier halt before the door of a room and point downwards. A thick, viscous stream — shining darkly crimson in the light of our torches — was slowly creeping along the cracks and depressions of the grimy floor. M. Dufresne hurried up at our call. For a moment we paused, for we knew that some horrible sight awaited us. Then with a gesture of finality Rousseau turned the handle. A blood-stained body, only dimly seen, was lying huddled against the wall; but it was not that which caused us to start back in amazement and horror. Sitting stiffly erect around a deal table, with grotesque, distorted bodies and grimacing

faces, were six men. One look at their staring eyes was enough. They were dead — blasted — shrivelled by some hideous force. We had entered this room on our first visit, and it had then been empty. The awful, inconceivable tragedy had been enacted during that hour which we had spent hidden and waiting in the shadows. Rousseau was about to approach the nightmare group when a groan caused us to wheel in alarm. We had quite forgotten the man on the floor. He was an Arab, and appeared to be one of the many itinerant vendors of trifles who expose their wares in the Paris cafés. Across his legs lay a bundle of Eastern rugs.

'Good Heavens!' cried Rousseau, kneeling beside him. 'It's the same fellow we caught spying. He must have got away. He is dying; someone has shot him. A doctor, quick!'

At the sound of Rousseau's voice, the Arab opened his eyes and his lips moved. Dufresne beckoned to the men crowding in awestruck silence around the door.

'Carry the poor fellow downstairs,' he snapped, 'and rush him to the nearest chemist. Come along, give a hand — and you, Colbert, guard this room.'

When the wounded man was taken away, Colbert walked to the window, which was closed, and tested the bolt, then, averting his eyes from the frozen assembly around the table, he shut and locked the door. I remained with him in the passage whilst the remainder of our men conducted the hastily dressed inmates of the hotel to the cells, locking the doors immediately their quarters were vacated.

'I've seen some strange sights, and so have you ——' Colbert was beginning, when Rousseau came dashing up the stairs.

'Quick — let me in!' he gasped, and snatched at the

key which Colbert held. Again the door opened wide, but if we had been startled before, it was stark terror which now ran like icy water along our nerves. Three of the dead, distorted figures had disappeared.

We seized and shook those which remained. They were dead — there was no doubt of that; yet three who had looked as lifeless as they had vanished. Ten minutes had passed since the Arab was carried away; we had locked and guarded the door, the window was thirty feet from the ground; nevertheless this incredible thing had happened. I gaped foolishly at my colleague, feeling that it was all a dream, but Rousseau was in a towering rage, and shouted at us until we recovered a little from the numbing shock.

'Voilà — 'crénom — look — the blood — footprints!' He tore open a cupboard and pointed triumphantly, whilst the cold wind of the coming day blew on our hot faces. Before us was a secret window, which had been masked by the sham cupboard. We were about to approach when Rousseau caught us both by the arms.

'Don't move! You'll spoil the strangest thing of this strange night if you do. Look on the ledge — see — there is the print of a naked foot in blood — and it has six toes! That is what was on the balcony of Elena's room. Not finger-prints, but a footprint.'

We looked, and saw for the first time that grotesque seal which finally convicted the monster who made it.

'The Arab is dead,' the Brigadier said, 'but before he died he whispered: "Not all killed — cupboard." That's what brought me back.'

When M. Dufresne was shown what we had found, he shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

'This is a case for M. Bertillon — it's beyond me. Those three were the men we were searching for. They

simply sat among the men they had killed and feigned death. Nothing must be touched until the doctor comes. We'll close the place and leave men on guard inside. Come, we can do nothing more until our chief has been here.'

Later in the day I learned that the terrible twisted appearance of the men we had found sitting at the table was due to cyanic acid, which had been hypodermically injected into the back of the neck between the vertebræ. Death had come like the dropping of a curtain.

Bundles of counterfeit notes were discovered in their pockets, and each one held a scrap of paper clutched in his hand, on which was written the single word 'Traitor.'

They were unknown at the identity department, and M. Bertillon was of the opinion that all three were Americans, for their clothes and boots bore the names of New York firms. Their photographs and finger-prints were at once sent to London and New York. Upon investigation we learned that the carpet-seller had been shut in an empty cell at the police station. A few minutes later, a drunken fool — with the shoulders and nose of a pugilist — had assaulted the police on duty outside and had threatened them with a pistol, which upon examination proved to be unloaded. His wild threats ceased the moment he was arrested, as though the realisation of his folly had sobered him. The police had shut him in the cell which contained the Arab. An hour later, when the officer on duty looked through the sliding panel, both had disappeared. The massive lock had been picked and the bars of a small window leading to the street had been wrenched apart.

The man who did this must have possessed the muscles of a gorilla. Only a vague description of the drunkard was gleaned, for owing to the raid there were only

two men at the station. These had thought it had been best to await the return of their colleagues before searching and questioning the prisoners. But they had both noticed the large, flattened nose and the huge shoulders of the drunken man. Dufresne was furious when he learned how easily his men had been fooled.

'Bon Dieu! You might have guessed that he was not drunk,' he raved. 'It was our man — the head of the gang — six toes. I feel sure of that. Such a simple trick, too. He carried a jemmy and keys, and made you arrest him in order to release the Arab. Filoche must have possessed some terrible knowledge to cause this rogue to risk everything in order to gain his release. Perhaps that was why he shot him after killing the other three.'

It was nearly evening when the door of my office opened and a burly form wearing a heavy coat and broad-brimmed hat stalked in. At first I did not recognise the visitor, but a glance at the hand stretched out to me — a curious signet-ring on the little finger — caused me to jump up with a shout of joy.

'Bannister, my dear fellow, I'm sure glad to see you.'

'Hum,' my friend grunted, squeezing many queer meanings into the sound. 'I'll have to take a permanent job here, I can see that; but this business of the six toes is the limit. Is the fellow a madman?'

'Bertillon thinks the mark was made with a rubber pad. No man would leave such damning evidence behind, if he really possessed six toes.'

'I see — a kind of seal — Captain Kidd, his mark, eh? Well, it's possible; but what I want to know is, how did he get down from the window in the rue Vallais and again last night at the hotel? Can he fly? That reminds me — those three fellows — I've just seen them, they were all American crooks — and badly wanted by the

New York police. Now the Devil's got them. No extradition from his realm.'

'Then you knew them?'

'Sure — they were real swells, too — only worked in the best hotels and on the big liners.'

'What, confidence tricksters?'

'No — anything — barratry, arson, murder, or flimflam. But that doesn't help you any, for we don't know their pals. But, say — Dufresne wants to go to that Grande Pinte again, and I'm asked to go with you. This is an international gang, and I may be able to help.'

'Fine! I've just had my orders. We'll have to dress in rags; anything else will be noticed. But you're so tall — you know the French Sûreté have a regulation that no detective shall be over five feet six. That's why I'm only rarely chosen.'

'H'm! I guess we can stoop and wear flat shoes. If there are any English or Yankee crooks in this business, it's best we should go. Come along; we'll *dress*.'

As I rose, the telephone buzzed, and I heard the voice of M. Bertillon: 'Go armed, mon ami. Watch every movement in the Passage. Above all, watch the roofs and windows. This fellow climbs down walls like a lizard. Find out all you can about Professor La Marra, distinguished biologist and surgeon, but use discretion. His museum and laboratory are near the Passage — number 291. *Let me know what his nose is like.* Good luck!'

Bannister laughed when I repeated my chief's orders.

'He's a deep one, Bertillon. We'll have a peep at the professor's nose. Allons.'

The prospect of another night in dirty rags was not alluring, but together with Bannister it was at least endurable.

The Grande Pinte was a well of darkness. Far away a single oil lamp flickered and smoked in the rising wind, and every door was pregnant with unknown dangers. We had discovered that a window of the professor's flat looked out upon the foul alley. This window was brilliantly illuminated, and now and then a huge shadow would suddenly pass — like a flitting bird of prey.

In front of a tumbledown wine-shop, where Cartouche the bandit had formerly lived, were some empty vats. By crouching behind them we were able to watch with little risk of being seen, and their huge bulk protected us somewhat from the cold. Time passed slowly. Our limbs ached from our cramped position, but when the pain became unendurable one of us would crawl into a barrel and stretch out at full length while the other watched. I was just entering my wine-soaked kennel for another spell of rest when Bannister clutched my arm. From the house behind us came a low murmur of voices. Breathless with excitement, we saw a dim face peer out between some rotting trellis. Then at a muttered word, several shadows moved silently across the narrow street. We counted five, and one was a woman, for we caught the gleam of earrings and heard a shrill, nervous laugh, instantly hushed. They stopped opposite our refuge and busied themselves with something which produced a metallic clang. Either a sliding door or cellar flap had opened. For a moment the glow of an electric torch illumined the group and fell full on the face of the woman. I started violently, for I knew her. Then a second clang and total darkness followed.

'Did you see her face?' Bannister whispered at my ear. 'That looks bad for the professor.'

'Yes,' I replied in the same manner. 'It was Joselita Sanchez, the circus artiste. She works with Paolo in a

trapeze act at the Cirque Medrano. Why do you say it looks bad for the professor?'

'Well, all Paris knows he's in love with her, and that Paolo openly insulted him not long ago.'

'Then perhaps they are sent by him to kill La Marra.'

'What, through a passage conveniently built from the cellars to his house? Why — '*ssh* ——'

The clash of metal on stone again sounded, then the same five shapes slipped by us towards the door leading to the rue de Charenton.

'After them,' I whispered. 'I'll stay here. Run to the other end and round by the rue aux Loups. Don't go through the front entrance. They may be watching. Rousseau and Colbert are at the Lapin Blanc, two doors away.'

Bannister vanished, running fast. The professor's window was still shining brightly, and I settled down to watch and wait. It was nearly an hour before Bannister joined me again.

'Colbert and two others are following those five. I think this will be a good night's work. Anything new?'

I was about to reply when midnight chimed at a distant church; with the sound, some occult change in the atmosphere made our nerves tingle. I felt my friend quiver. It was not with our ears nor eyes that we had noticed anything — it was a feeling, as though a psychic sense had warned us. Bannister was crouching and staring at the square of light above. I saw that now not one but several shadows flitted back and forth across the window. Suddenly the green-white glow changed to a dull red, and I heard again that hyena squeal which had heralded the tragedy at Montmartre. It was a laugh that held nothing human, and pealed out like the shrill, whistling neigh of a stallion. The sound made our blood run

cold. Almost at once the red glow faded and darkness pressed on us like a material thing.

'My God, what a horrible sound!' Bannister said, and his voice shook.

'Yes,' I replied; 'I heard it last night when we waited outside the hotel. That professor has something to do with the ghastly business — but we can't enter his house. What do you suggest?'

''*Sshh!* Listen! Someone is moving.' Again we heard a door swing back and a huge inchoate bulk appeared. Our eyes were of little use in the gloom, but we could see that it was a man. Despite his size, he moved with noiseless steps towards the tiny ruined building where we crouched. We waited until he entered, and then followed, using our torches sparingly. Inside the café fallen bricks and rusty iron made a soundless advance difficult. When we reached what should have been the outer wall, a dim glow became visible. Before us was a door, and from under the shrunken boards came a ray of light. A murmur of voices caused us to jump hurriedly behind a pile of bricks, the door swung open and shut, and a lithe figure passed like a ghost, but in the momentary illumination we had both caught sight of a swarthy face and great, bulging shoulders.

'The nose,' my friend whispered; 'did you see it? And the eyes with their twisted eyebrows? That was the professor — and the door leads into the back room of the Lapin Blanc. Come along; we must see where he goes.'

But although we explored all the corners and doors of the Passage, we saw no sign of La Marra. He had vanished — nor had our colleagues outside seen anyone leave. We decided at last to return to the Sûreté to report. But our movements had not passed unnoticed, for as we rose to go, several dark shapes rushed at us, and we

saw the gleam of knives. Making our sticks sing round our heads, we backed quickly before our assailants could use their weapons, and ran for our lives. If we were not to spoil all chances of success, our aggressors must be left in doubt whether we were really from headquarters or just vagabonds sheltering from the cold. We gained the rue aux Loups without being pursued, and were lucky enough to find a taxi. The driver looked doubtfully at our torn clothes and dirty faces, but the address of Bannister's office and the sight of some money which I half pulled from my pocket reassured him. It was daylight when we arrived at the Sûreté. Rousseau was there, and greatly excited.

'The body of a young girl has been found in the Seine at the Quai Bercy,' he exclaimed. 'She has not yet been identified. And Paolo the acrobat has disappeared. He did not come to the circus last night, and his turn was cancelled. His concierge says that he has not been seen for two days. Colbert followed those men from the Grande Pinte. He caught them trying to set fire to a small push-cart made from packing-cases and mounted on two bicycle wheels, which was hidden in a boat-house near the river. The boards are blood-stained, and against one side is that horrible print of the foot with six toes. A man and woman got away, but the others are in the cells. The girl whose body we dragged from the river was killed in an atrocious manner. I imagine a madman committed the crime, for a trephine has been used. We are certain now that La Marra, although a well-known scientist with an excellent reputation, is the leader of the gang; furthermore, the Spanish woman Joselita, who was Paolo's partner, has been seen in the professor's company more than once. What have you to report?'

I related our adventures. When I described the scene

in the Passage and told him of the weird cry we had heard, his eyes glittered.

'M. Dufresne is with Bertillon. None of us have slept. I'll go to him at once.'

Just then the telephone buzzed, and for a minute Rousseau listened attentively.

'Bien,' came his reply, 'I will see to it. The girl's body has been identified,' he said, turning to us. 'It is Mademoiselle Mimi Delcart.'

'What? The music-hall star?' Bannister interrupted.

'Yes, poor thing. She was barely nineteen, and deliciously pretty. Bertillon wants you to come to his office immediately.'

We found the famous man with M. Dufresne. Both looked tired, and their eyes were red from want of sleep. They listened in silence to our report — making notes of the various incidents. When we had finished, Bertillon remained for a long time in deep thought. At last he roused himself and said:

'We dare not wait. Valuable evidence may be destroyed whilst we are inactive. I have almost completed my case, but I still want your help. That cry you heard was probably uttered when Paolo died, and La Marra is the murderer. Now listen—here is the card of a distinguished English surgeon—a fictitious name, of course. Do you think you can play the part?' and he turned to Bannister.

'I'll try.'

'Very well. I want you to call on this Professor Pedro La Marra. His museum is famous. If you are embarrassed by your want of medical knowledge, feign to be deaf or pretend that you understand very little French. Go there at five when the professor is generally at home. Whilst you keep him talking, your colleague will explore

the passage behind the cellar door. If I'm not here when you return, report to M. Dufresne. I shall be at work on the blood-stained pushcart, and will remain at the laboratory all night. By the way, M. Bannistery, don't use false hair. The professor is no fool. Spectacles and clothes must suffice. Have a good look at his boots.'

Bannister nodded, and we both withdrew to snatch a few hours' rest. At five we met in the rue de Charenton. A signal had been agreed upon in case one of us got into trouble, and when I had seen Bannister enter the professor's house, I walked down the Grande Pinte. It was already dark, and I managed to raise the two heavy iron flaps and slip down unobserved. Flicking the beams from my torch right and left, I saw that stone steps led some twenty feet obliquely under the house next to the professor's. Feeling my way carefully, I gained a vaulted tunnel which ran at right angles to the stairs, but which twisted again in a half-circle. Water dripped from the roof, and the air was foul with some strange odour almost like that of stale acids. I carefully counted my steps and felt sure, when I arrived at a massive iron door, that I was under the house Bannister had entered. There was a brass handle in the door, and I grasped this firmly. Instantly agonising pains twisted my limbs, the torch slipped from my hand, and my chest laboured with the throbbing of the electric current passing through me. In a dim, semi-conscious way I heard a snarling laugh, then — blessed relief — the current was shut off, and I dropped to the ground helpless and faint. My hands were twisted behind me and fastened, and a stifling cloth wound about my head. Strong hands lifted and carried me along what must have been a very narrow gallery, for the footsteps of my captors produced loud echoes. Finally, I was thrown to the ground. For a long time I

remained motionless, recovering slowly from the fearful electric shock. I was about to test the chain around my wrist when I heard again murmuring voices and a heavy body fell with a thud and rolled against me, then silence once more. Cautiously I felt along the mass pressing on my arms. It was a human being, but no movement replied to my pressure. Abruptly my heart contracted. I had encountered a hand, and on that hand was a ring which I knew well.

'Jim!' I called through the heavy cloth over my face. 'Jim — Bannister — old friend — for God's sake, answer.' But no reply came, although the hand against mine was warm. Twisting and wriggling, I succeeded in placing my fingers on his wrist. Thank Heaven, the pulse was strong and steady. As though my touch had brought back consciousness, my friend gave a muffled groan. Then to my amazement I heard a choking laugh.

'That you?' came his voice. 'They've got us — I can hardly breathe. The professor is a darling. He showed me some wonderful ancient skulls and, whilst I bent over them, a cloth was twisted round my face and a punch from a fist like a hammer put me to sleep. We're some fine investigators to be caught like babies. How'd they get you?'

I told him as best I could, for I had to stop after each word to breathe.

'Then you sure fared worse than I did; I felt nothing. Say, what'll they do to us? Where are we?'

'Kill us, of course. As to where we are, well — that doesn't matter, does it?'

'I don't know. Try to reach the rope on my arms.'

'It's not a rope — it's a chain,' I gasped. 'I felt it just now. They wouldn't have left us back to back if there had been knots to untie.'

After that both of us lay silent trying to think, but the air which came to our lungs was foul with some heavy drug, my senses began to play tricks, and a black cloud of horror robbed me of all power to move. Death seemed already very near when, like cool, sweet water on the lips of a desert traveller, a cold gust of air blew on my face. The scarf had gone and my hands were free. Bending over me I saw the stern, anxious face of my chief, M. Bertillon, whilst all around my colleagues stood and watched.

'A close call, mon ami. Another hour, and both of you would have been in the Seine. That brave girl, there, Paulette, rang me up. Never mind the rest. Can you stand? We've got the professor's house surrounded, and we can reach it through these tunnels. You are within twenty yards of the river — but the opening was covered by an iron flap, and this place was filled with some poisonous gas. Here, drink some of this.'

I swallowed the strong spirit in great gulps, and new life throbbed through my arteries. Bannister was kneeling near me, already normal again, and in the shadows I saw a young girl — a blood-stained bandage round her head.

'What are you going to do, monsieur?' I asked. 'Raid the house? Because, if so, please give me five minutes to recover. I want to be there.'

But it was nearly an hour before I managed to walk with the help of Bannister's strong arm.

It was a queer place we were in. The tunnel must have been built centuries ago — for everywhere we saw traces of Gothic arches and burial niches, and in one place many skull and thigh bones had been grouped around a complete skeleton.

'Some forgotten branch of our catacombs,' said M.

Bertillon, noting my glance. 'It leads into the modern shaft where you were caught.'

Finally we came to the iron door, but now it gaped wide, and a sturdy policeman stood on each side.

'Give the signal for our men to enter the house,' said my chief. 'We shall meet inside.'

Steep stairs led to the professor's flat, which was guarded by another door. A man wearing rubber gloves turned the handle and pulled it back. With a rush we were inside, just as whistles shrilled and sticks beat against the outer door. The professor, in trousers and shirt, met us on the threshold of a white-walled laboratory. In each hand he held a pistol. Red flames instantly spat from the barrels, but before he could fire again, he was seized and the weapons wrenched from his hands. His strength was terrific, and it was fortunate that we had taken him by surprise. One look at the twisted, glaring eyes and foam-flecked lips told us that we were dealing with a madman. Suddenly he ceased to struggle, and his gaze fastened on a huddled, blood-stained bundle which my comrades were tenderly lifting from the floor. It was the girl Paulette; she had received both shots from the monster's pistols. As I turned, a wild, horrible, gurgling laugh, ending in the squeal of a wild beast, burst from the professor. It was the sound we had heard twice before.

'That's the death yell of the Martinique Voodoo priests,' M. Bertillon gasped. 'He must be from the West Indies.'

The dreadful laugh had ended in a faint sibilant breathing — sickening in its note of bestial satisfaction.

Holding La Marra by twisted chains, four Sûreté officers threw him across a table and dragged off his shoes,

and there before our eyes was the strange sight of feet bearing six toes.

'Take him away,' Bertillon ordered, and he was dragged downstairs to a waiting car in which were already four others of the madman's gang who had been caught in the tunnel. We then began a methodical examination of the flat and the strange uncanny appliances which were strewn about. In the museum were several complete skeletons hanging on metal stands and protected from the air by glass cases.

M. Bertillon smashed a pane and made several tests — then he pointed a shaking hand at the grim exhibits.

'These were supposed to be prehistoric — but the yellow colour is artificial. They are the remains of his victims. Oh, the clever beast! Instead of trying to hide the bodies, he dissolved them in acids and kept the bones. This must have gone on for years. No doubt many of those strange disappearances which have remained unsolved mysteries will now at last be cleared up.'

'Then why did he throw that poor girl Mimi into the Seine?' Bannister queried.

'Because — because — look!' and our chief pulled away a rubber curtain from before a large stone bath.

We all started back with a shout of horror; the missing acrobat was found. The acid in the bath was still bubbling and seething.

'Perhaps the girl was killed by his men and he was afraid to keep the body here, but why — why?' our chief muttered, continuing his search. In the study a cosy lamp illuminated a large table on which were strewn a number of books and surgical instruments. There was also a species of diary, and I saw that the entries were in cypher. Waving us back, M. Bertillon sat down and examined the volumes.

As the long minutes passed, we realised that he had quite forgotten our presence. Page after page was turned hurriedly and his busy pencil flew over the leaves of his famous notebook, now the treasured possession of the Sûreté. We settled down to a long wait, chatting in undertones. Not one of us desired to leave, for Bertillon always communicated the results of his investigation to us and we knew that the explanation we should hear would amply compensate our patience. At last Bertillon replaced the books with a sigh of content, and, rising, looked at our eager faces.

'One moment more, messieurs,' he said with a grim smile, 'and you shall hear what I have found.'

Picking up an electric torch he walked through the laboratory into the museum, and we saw him examining the skeletons hanging there. Then he came back, satisfaction in the glint of his eyes. 'Voilà!' he began — unconsciously assuming the tone of a lecturer.

'This Pedro La Marra believes himself to be the descendant of Papaloi La Marra — a former Voodoo priest. His story is here,' and he placed his hand on a small dingy volume. 'Papaloi La Marra and all his kin had six toes, and this peculiarity was supposed by the priests to be the sign of Don Pedro — the Negro name for the Evil One. These priests were great sorcerers and fanatic devil-worshippers and believed that the heart and the brain of human victims contained the essence of life and power. Whether this man we have caught is truly of the sorcerer's brood I don't know, but he believes it. Perhaps in his crazed brain the fact that he possessed six toes induced the belief. Anyhow, I shall investigate his past and discover where he comes from. He was supposed to be Spanish, but now I feel sure that Haiti is his birthplace. Those former priests always left a blood-

stained footprint behind when they claimed a victim, and they were credited with the ability to climb up and down perpendicular walls. This fellow certainly appears to possess that gift. As yet we cannot conjecture how he succeeded in gaining the bedroom of the girl Elena nor how he escaped from the rue Lepic, unless he clambered down the wall. He may, however, have used ropes and hooks, for at the rue Lepic he was not alone — yet they all got away. If he had not added the printing of counterfeit money to his other crimes, we might never have suspected him.'

'Did you find the plant?' Bannister asked eagerly.

'Oh, yes, in that underground tunnel, a beautiful modern press and perfect plates. And we've received a cable from New York. Those three men we found in Montmartre had friends — and we now have their descriptions. It will be a clean sweep.

'By a strange freak of chance, Mademoiselle Elena once broke her leg, and the tibia of a female skeleton in there bears the mark of a similar fracture. She was, I imagine, an innocent accomplice of the professor, who must in some way have made use of her. Her death became necessary when she learned the truth. Perhaps her jewels had something to do with this too. She was abducted from her bedroom, carried to this house, and killed. I think that La Marra entered her room from the roof. The marks left by his confederates prove that he was not alone. Félipe was captured to-night and has confessed. He escaped from Cayenne with the help of a twin brother who took his place and died there. I imagine that Pedro La Marra was madly infatuated with the circus girl, Joselita, and craved money to outdo his rivals in generosity. We know the girl introduced him to an American crook named Chink Wallace — who needed

help to print and pass the counterfeit notes. We do not yet know who engraved the plates, but that is only a matter of time. Thus, as usual, a woman has been the cause of his ruin. Two women, rather, for the unfortunate Paulette loved the professor, who had promised to marry her. Mad with jealous rage, Paulette had watched La Marra's growing infatuation for Joselita. She had persuaded the men the professor killed in Montmartre to betray him, but the Algerian had warned La Marra in time. It was Paulette who shot Sidi Filoche when he tried to escape with the others, thus bringing us on the scene unexpectedly. She had then informed the Spaniard's partner that Joselita visited the professor, and Paolo had gone to this house. La Marra killed him on the night you were hidden in the Grande Pinte. As a last resource Paulette telephoned to me to-night that you were both prisoners in the tunnel and explained the mechanism of the electric doors.

'Pedro La Marra is a madman, or at least a monomaniac, and his mania led him to imitate the foul customs of the Voodoo priests. Is there anything else you wish to know?'

'The girl Mimi Delcart ——?'

'I don't know — he had only one acid bath. I have just said that those priests believed that human hearts and brains contained the essence of life. Don't ask me for details. Come, let us go now, we have yet much work to do and we all need sleep.'

No confession was ever obtained from Professor La Marra; he died some years later in a criminal lunatic asylum. M. Bertillon had guessed aright. The man was a Creole from La Martinique. His arrest caused a sensation, for the man had written many learned monographs

and had been considered an eminent surgeon and biologist. Although his accomplices confessed to the making and passing of counterfeit notes, they denied all knowledge of the murders, and the jury acquitted them on the capital charge. They were sent to New Caledonia for life.

EPISODE III

THE DOUBLE LIFE OF DR. BOUGRAT
PHYSICIAN AND APACHE

Truly there is a squat, evil, leering Hyde lurking in the slime and murk of man's primeval memory; a twin self, which every one of us drags along from youth to old age, as a convict on the Devil's Isle drags his chain and ball. He is shut away in the subconscious mind and on the door are graven 'Christianity' and 'Civilization.' Yet he is alert and ready to leap forth at any moment. Some are fortunate: the door is locked and bolted and the primitive evil hammers in vain on the barrier, transmitting only the vibration of his bestial rage. With others the barrier is frail: let them but once slip back the bolt and with a rush and a roar of glee Hyde takes possession. Every sensuous thought weakens the power to resist the creature's promptings. Only thus can one explain the sudden crash, the abrupt fall of that Jekyll in real life, Dr. Pierre Bougrat, of Marseilles, physician of note, young, happy, with a good practice, an excellent reputation and a constant stream of patients. His professional career and home life should have placed him far above temptation.

Esteemed by all, Dr. Bougrat, who was born in Annecy in 1890, had been given the Legion of Honour — that highest award of the soldier — for his gallant conduct during the World War. In 1920, Dr. Bougrat settled down in a spacious apartment, 37 rue Senac, in Marseilles, and married the daughter of a well-known medical man, Dr. Avierinos, who, as a wedding-gift, presented the son-in-law with the greater part of his lucra-

tive practice. A year later, a baby girl came to gladden the life of the young couple. It is inconceivable that a man so high in the good graces of Destiny should, in the short space of two years, have become a criminal — a vile, slinking apache, frequenting the dregs of the underworld, speaking their snarling argot — a gentleman by day, a ruffian by night, until a foul and cowardly murder finally sent him, crushed and shattered, to await his fate in the condemned cell. Those who believe in demoniac possession could not find a more astounding subject for investigation than this perplexing case. Nor is it a story of the past, for Dr. Pierre Bougrat was sentenced to be guillotined by the Court of Aix-en-Provence in May, 1927.

I chanced to be in Marseilles busy on another case when the man was first arrested for passing worthless cheques. I can thus relate the facts from my own work during the investigation, and from the records in the archives of the police.

The air was fragrant with the queer scent of southern seaports. Dazzling sunshine and a deep blue sky added their harmony of light to the brilliant colours of the curious throng which had gathered around the ancient bronze doors of Notre Dame des Douleurs. A wedding — almost a society wedding — had caused the idlers to collect. Young girls carrying baskets of golden oranges, which glowed as though of burnished metal, completed a picture of crude contrasts such as one sees only in the land of the olive and the cedar. The ceremony was over; the bells pealed loudly and the drone of the organ suddenly swept in a burst of stately music from the opening doors. For a moment the newly joined couple halted in the shadow, dazzled by the vivid glare, whilst a babel of

Latin voices discussed their appearance with laughing freedom. The man was Dr. Pierre Bougrat, young and handsome and faultlessly dressed. On his arm was the bride, in shimmering white, a huge veil draping her face and form. Confused at the critical remarks of the crowd, she gathered her train with a graceful gesture and prepared to run the gauntlet of confetti and shouts of good will. She was happy — radiantly happy — and looked at her husband with adoration shining in her eyes. He, too, was proud of his beautiful wife and seemed unwilling to curtail this moment of triumph. At last he moved slowly forward, casting smiles right and left. A young girl with flashing black eyes and brown curly hair who had pushed her way to the front was standing with parted lips looking at the advancing couple. Her eyes were fastened on the man, and as he encountered her gaze he started violently and the colour receded from his face. For a moment these two remained, staring hypnotically, then — almost with an audible snap — the circuit of riotous thoughts was broken, the bride and bridegroom crossed the stretch of carpeted street and entered their waiting car, whilst Andrea Audibert — the girl — withdrew with a laugh and disappeared in the crowd. That moment was the turning-point in the life of Dr. Bougrat. A tide of wild fantastic shapes was seething in his brain as the car drove off, although outwardly he appeared calm. But the eyes — those cruel brilliant eyes of Andrea — were graven on his memory. His wife's voice roused him from a reverie.

'Who was that girl, Pierre? Do you know her? How she stared at you!'

'No, sweetheart, I never saw her before; but you know what these common people are. They love to act

and posture to make their friends believe all kinds of things. I thought she was looking at you,' he lied, as an afterthought.

So for the time the matter dropped; but somehow that incident cast a gloom over the day, and it was with a sigh of relief that the young wife snuggled down in the train which was carrying them to the Italian Lakes, where they were to spend their honeymoon. Yet it was true; her husband had never seen the girl before. But from that predestined moment she haunted his thoughts. By day he had only to close his eyes to see again the red smiling lips, the brilliant eyes, and the curly hair — at night he dreamed of them. 'She has bewitched me — confound her,' he muttered to himself more than once; and he startled his wife one morning by asking her suddenly, 'Do you believe in the evil eye — the Iettatura of the Italians?'

'Why, mon chéri,' she inquired anxiously, 'what a queer question.'

'Well — I ask because I still seem to see that creature staring at me whom we met on our wedding-day.'

His wife shuddered and crossed herself in haste, and later he found her in tears. It was his last attempt at frankness, for from day to day the obsession grew and he realised that it was not repulsion but desire — a mad, violent passion which had taken possession of his soul. However wrong it was, he must find the girl again.

A letter from an agent, stating that a suitable apartment with a surgery had become vacant in the rue Senac, came as a welcome excuse. The honeymoon was curtailed and Dr. Bougrat and his wife returned to Marseilles and settled down in their new home. For a time both were busy, he with the installation of his surgery and laboratory, she with the thousand schemes

for beautifying their apartment which a loving wife will always weave. Everyone and everything conspired to make them happy. Friends flocked to welcome them, invitations to dances and dinners came daily, and the practice which Dr. Avierinos was deflecting to his son-in-law was already shaping for certain success. But Dr. Bougrat was dissatisfied. He knew — he felt — that there was no peace, no rest for him, until he discovered the girl who had so impressed him. At all costs he must meet her and speak to her. He hoped thus to know once and for all whether he could tear her image from his heart or whether he was destined to surrender helplessly to her charms.

His moods, fantastic and uncertain at the best of times, became irritable and gloomy. When his wife inquired tenderly if anything was on his mind, he replied that his nerves were still at times upset by the sufferings endured in the war, and for a space this reply deceived everyone.

Since his increasing practice demanded much of his time, he began to specialise in gynæcology, hoping that perhaps among his feminine patients the unknown might appear. Then in the evening he would leave his flat by the laboratory door, slinking out in secret, to wander aimlessly from street to street and from tavern to tavern. To see her once more — to encounter again the gaze of those magnetic eyes — was the maddening thought which swirled round in his brain; whilst the vision seen on his wedding-day danced ever, like a will-o'-the-wisp, before him. At times he fought frenziedly against the obsession, for as a doctor he realised that he was on the brink of monomania. But although he smiled grimly at the self-deception, he reasoned weakly and falsely that the only cure was to destroy the grotesque

impression by making the girl's acquaintance, when she would probably dwindle to the proportions of an ignorant peasant, since, despite her beauty, he knew that she was not of his own kind. For many months his search was unavailing and he began to fear that she had left the town. Quarrels provoked by the selfish neglect of his wife became more and more frequent, and the future of the young couple was already seriously endangered when a baby birl was born. The little creature should have become a link between husband and wife, but it was only for a moment that the tide of his thoughts was stemmed. The mother now transferred her love to the child and gave Dr. Bougrat that freedom which he craved in secret.

It was at the races, quite unexpectedly, that he saw Andrea again. At the conclusion of the main event, a boisterous crowd was escorting horse and jockey to the stables, and for a second a vision of flashing eyes and red, voluptuous lips thrilled him like an electric shock. The jostling, excited crowd prevented the doctor from approaching, but with clenched teeth, indifferent to insults and angry protests, he elbowed his way forward until he could watch the girl's movements. Unfortunately she was not alone. Several men of the type the South calls Nervi, who correspond to the apache of Paris, were with her and made an effective barrier. Dr. Bougrat could do nothing but watch, yet he resolved to wait and follow until at least he discovered where she lived. He realised now that she was of the dregs — common, vulgar, probably of doubtful virtue; yet, strange to say, the thought gave him no pain — rather did he welcome the knowledge that thus she would be his more easily.

Night had come before the girl and her friends made

any move to return to town, and several further hours were spent drifting from tavern to tavern. At last, after many noisy leave-takings, he saw that she was about to go home. One of the men, a squat, broad-shouldered fellow, young and handsome in a coarse fashion, accompanied her to a squalid dwelling near the harbour; a den of thieves and worse. Undaunted, not even feeling the pangs of hunger, Dr. Bougrat — the man of fashion — settled down in a Chinese tea-house opposite, determined to wait, certain that his patience would be rewarded. His abnormal condition made him indifferent to the curious looks and snarling comments of the men and women lounging at the tables. He had commenced his third cup of opium tea when he noticed that two girls were whispering and pointing in his direction. When they perceived that he was aware of their scrutiny, one of them came to his table and, bending down, asked:

'What are you, police?'

Bougrat shook his head. 'No, I am waiting for the girl with the black eyes who lives over there,' and he jerked his head towards the dirty house.

'Oh — you mean Andrea *la guapa*; but she is the sweetheart of the Panther, Marius, one of the most deadly Nervi in Marseilles. You'll get a knife in your ribs if you meddle with his girl.'

'Andrea, you say? What else?'

'Andrea Audibert — she is from Arles; we call her "*la guapa*" because she looks Spanish; she has run away from home because of Marius. If you like I'll go and tell her that you wish to make her acquaintance — that is, if you make it worth my while, for Marius would kill me if he knew.' Dr. Bougrat pulled a bank-note from his pocket — foolishly displaying a bulging wallet

— and handed it to the girl, who, with a grin, slipped the money into her stocking and disappeared. The doctor strolled to the door, his heart beating wildly. At last the long-deferred moment had arrived. Suddenly he saw two slim feminine shapes in the dark frame of the open door and at the same moment a hand beckoned. Without hesitation he walked across the narrow street and entered. Before him, almost touching him, was the vision of his dreams and a wave of faint perfume added to the intoxication of his senses. But he felt embarrassed and stammered, tongue-tied, unable to say more than, 'Mademoiselle — I — I have loved you since the day I was married.'

A shrill burst of laughter made him realise the utter absurdity of such a speech. Seeing his difficulty the girl who had been his messenger flitted from the doorway and left them alone. Now speech came in a torrent; with burning words he described how she had haunted him, how he had searched high and low, until at last that day, he had found her.

'And you are rich?' came in an eager whisper from her — the first words she had spoken.

They chilled his ardour somewhat — but with a shrug of the shoulders he answered: 'Mais oui, I am rich, and can give you many presents — jewels, furs, fine dresses ——'

'Bien, but what about Marius?' a hoarse voice growled from the gloom. A rough hand pushed the girl aside and the sneering face of the Panther was thrust within an inch of the doctor's. Before he could reply, the head was lowered and struck him like a battering-ram in the stomach.

When he regained his senses he was lying in the gutter — bruised, bleeding, with torn clothes. His

jacket and pocket-book, watch and rings — all had been taken. The foul alley was dark and deserted and the feel of dawn was in the air. Painfully he dragged himself along the cobbles until at last twinkling lights warned him that the Cannebière, the Boulevard of Marseilles, was before him.

To his wife, who was mad with anxiety at his prolonged absence, he explained that he had been attacked and robbed. His appearance confirmed this story, but unfortunately his wife found a scrap of paper in the pocket of his vest on which had been scrawled:

Salaud — Next time you'll not try to steal another man's girl.

Worst of all, it was his wife's birthday, a fact which he had quite forgotten when he left the house early the previous day. His wife packed her trunks, and twenty-four hours later returned with her baby to her father and commenced divorce proceedings.

Events now crowded on the unfortunate man with a rush. At first utter despair held him in its grip, but, like an evil whisper, permeating his despair, came the thought — crushed, stifled, but still there, 'You are free now — free to woo Andrea!'

For several days Dr. Bougrat sought the treacherous solace of morphine. Not to think — that was his desire; but thought would not be banished, and although stupefied with drugs his dreams gravitated around the one centre — Andrea. At last he roused himself from his lethargy. The *locum tenens* he had called could look after his patients for the time, whilst he gave himself up to a frantic search. His first care was to dress as a ruffian, then, with a loaded revolver in his pocket, he slipped out by the back door and gained the harbour.

He had determined to shoot the Nervi on the slightest provocation. Already murder seemed nothing if by killing the man he could gain his heart's desire. But the house was empty. Aware of his identity — for his pocket-book had contained several letters — the sweet couple had fled in fear of the police. Bougrat laughed bitterly when the same girl he had sent to call Andrea related their hurried flight.

'As if the Devil would let her out of my life,' he said. 'We are bound by chains forged in hell — I shall find her and she will be mine.' Released from all restraint, he spent his nights roaming through the worst haunts. Of set purpose, knowing full well that the girl would never ascend to his level, he deliberately debased himself and descended to hers. He sought the companionship of all the scum of a Mediterranean seaport. Negroes, Lascars, Chinese coolies, and the women of this world of vice and crime taught him their tricks, their manners, and their slang. In a short time he became one of them. His appearance no longer excited comment, for his dress and talk differed in nothing from their own. Fights with deadly weapons, bludgeons, knives and pistols, became a nightly diversion, and many times he crawled home at dawn, wounded, sore and ragged. With his fall he had grown cunning, and no one suspected that the handsome, smiling doctor, faultlessly groomed, who by day tended his patients with care, became at night a creature of loathsome habits, possessing every vice. And then he saw Andrea again, accompanied by her lover. This time Bougrat was not afraid. Assuming a truculent air, he slouched up to the couple and with a blow knocked the fellow down. At once all was confusion. Tables were hurled aside — chairs were seized by the legs — bottles and glasses flew through the

air. Bougrat had now many friends, so had the Panther, and these at once split into clans and crowded round their leaders. A battle was imminent when Andrea sprang on a table and throwing her arms wide, yelled:

'Stop! Stop! Mon homme, Marius, shall fight with his rival. A fair fight and I'll belong to the winner.'

A roar of approval greeted the words, and a lonely spot on the coast was at once chosen. Bougrat relinquished his pistol and was handed a long knife, whilst a similar weapon was given to the apache. The girl was to watch the fight whilst the others barred the road at each end.

Like wild beasts the two men faced each other, their jackets wrapped round their left arms as shields. But Bougrat was no match for Marius, who, since his childhood, had learned to fight for his life. An upward stab that was like the flicker of a snake's tongue caught the doctor in the shoulder. His knees sagged, his knife dropped from his hand; already the apache — a cruel glint in his tiny eyes — was preparing to drive the blade to the heart, when Bougrat yelled:

'Stop — assez, don't kill me; I'll buy Andrea from you.'

At the words Marius straightened up. Money — that was better than murder, and what was a girl, after all?

'Ça va! How much will you pay?'

'Two thousand francs.'

A shrill cry came from Andrea. 'You miser! Is that all I'm worth? Kill him, Marius!'

But the others had now closed round the group. Some of the money would be spent on liquor, and they decided to put the matter to the vote.

The outcome of this strange bargain was that Dr. Bougrat was to pay four thousand francs to Marius,

who agreed to relinquish all right to the favours of Andrea. Furthermore, Marius was to receive three hundred francs a month. Whilst this was paid regularly, he would keep out of the way, but his right to the girl would revert to him if Dr. Bougrat failed to pay this income. A letter, which was later found in the doctor's house, was written and signed to that effect. Andrea and the apache accompanied the doctor to the rue Senac, where, after applying a bandage to his wound, weak and pale, but with a surge of savage joy at the sight of the girl so soon to reign in his home, as she had long reigned in his heart, the poor deluded fool paid the four thousand francs. The Panther withdrew — Andrea remained!

One can imagine that the life which Dr. Bougrat now led has a parallel only in the history of the Revolution; when lords and ladies, herded in foul cells with the canaille, danced and made love to each other, whilst a grim apotheosis — the guillotine — waited at the end of a cobbled street, over which the tumbrils rumbled daily, carrying their load of resignation and vainglorious defiance. He, too, laughed and defied Destiny, for he had gained his heart's desire; and the guillotine, but a shadow as yet, also waited without.

The glamour of passion was soon rent to shreds. Andrea had only one thought — money, money, and yet more money. And this stream of money was spent foolishly in carousing with her former friends, on gaudy jewels and mad caprices. Unlike most of her type, she had no ambition to become a lady. Of the dregs she was and of the dregs she remained, and down, down in a whirling rush, she dragged the man, weak and unresisting. It appears that at this period he again called drugs to his aid. Naturally enough poverty soon grimaced at

his elbow, his patients began to shun his surgery, and his friends shook their heads and sighed. By day he still parodied the elegant, care-free doctor, but he found it increasingly difficult to hide the growing coarseness of his ways. Imperceptibly at first, but ever gaining ground, the primitive beast claimed his soul. He struggled vainly in the net, and for a time refused to commit a crime. Then it was that Andrea, sure of her power, played her trump card and disappeared from the rue Senac. That was the end of his resistance. Money would bring her back, so money he would obtain. Among his patients was a beautiful Greek girl named Odette Lepocal, who occupied a lonely villa at La Ciotat, a tiny locality not far from Marseilles. She was in the habit of coming once a week for treatment, which consisted in the injection of a certain serum. Her story is that on the day she usually called, the doctor came to her villa, saying with an amiable smile:

'I happened to be at La Ciotat for another patient, chère madame, so I thought I would spare you the journey, the more so since you should always rest and sleep after the injection. If you will lie down on your couch, I will tend you here.'

Quite unsuspicious, Mademoiselle Odette did as he suggested. At the prick of the needle, a fierce pain caused her to cry out wildly, and she lost consciousness almost at once. When she came to her senses, she was firmly tied to a truckle bed in an unfamiliar room. A masked man was holding a bottle of salts under her nose, whilst seated at a table were several sinister ruffians. She attempted to call for help, but the poison in her blood had robbed her of the power to move or speak. Seeing her eyes open, the masked man, who, she feels sure, was Dr. Bougrat, grasped her hand and

felt her pulse — unconsciously drawing a gold watch from his pocket. Then, in a husky, assumed voice and with coarse words, he informed her that she was a prisoner and would remain there until she revealed where her money was hidden. She shook her head in sign of refusal, but the effort caused her to lapse once more into unconsciousness.

That same night, a car, coming along the highroad from Toulon to Marseilles, was attacked by masked bandits, who had hidden in a tiny stone hut used by the road-menders to keep their tools. By a miracle the shots fired at the chauffeur missed him, although they smashed the wind-screen. Thanks to his powerful engine the man escaped unhurt.

Two patients — both women — who at the time were loath to inform the police, came forward later and stated that after the usual injection, which, strange to say, Dr. Bougrat insisted on giving at their homes, they had both lost consciousness. When they recovered, they found the doctor at their bedside. After giving them stimulants, he informed them that their condition was not serious, and, in fact, one of the patients soon recovered, but the other, Madame Lepic, was seriously ill for a long time. Later, when the doctor had gone, both women discovered that their jewellery and money were missing. Naturally Dr. Bougrat realised that such tricks would quickly bring about his arrest, and he sought a victim who could give him the means of regaining the truant Andrea. Soulless, and utterly bereft of pity, he chose his former comrade in arms, Jacques Rumèbe, for Rumèbe was paymaster of a large factory, and carried twenty-nine thousand francs from the bank to the works every Saturday. It was a simple matter to prepare the trap. Rumèbe was a patient, and

came for treatment every Saturday morning. On March 13th he called as usual. The doctor, after a rapid examination, informed his friend that a second injection of serum would be necessary, and told him to call at two o'clock on his way from the bank.

'You can enter by the laboratory door, old friend,' he said, slapping Rumèbe on the back, 'and come straight up — so that you need not wait your turn.'

Unsuspicious of his impending fate, Rumèbe called with his bag, in which by a strange chance there were only nine thousand francs this time. He entered, and was never seen alive again!

That same evening it was noticed that Bougrat was spending money freely. Late at night he discovered Andrea and lured her back with the sight of a bundle of bank-notes and the promise of more to come. Meanwhile, poor Mademoiselle Odette was still a prisoner, watched by the apache Marius, who had now become the doctor's ally. Stubborn and angry, Mademoiselle Odette had refused to give way, but her strength was ebbing fast. The disappearance of the girl and the paymaster caused a tremendous stir in Marseilles. Mademoiselle had lived quite alone, but Rumèbe was married and father of two girls. No one as yet suspected Dr. Bougrat, and it was rumoured that Rumèbe had betrayed his trust. The wife, in her despair, went to his friend and comrade, the doctor — who cynically offered to help in the search, adding:

'If he has been killed, chère madame, you may come to me for a *post-mortem*. I shall not charge anything.'

The horror which this remark caused may be conceived when it was proved in court that at the time the body of the dead man was hidden in the room where the distracted wife was sitting. The downward rush of

the doctor was now gathering momentum. The nine thousand francs were but a drop in the ocean. There is no doubt that Andrea, and Marius, too, guessed at, if they did not actually take part in, the crime. Money was urgently needed. Bougrat knew that sooner or later the odour of decay would betray him. Flight, instant flight, and, if possible, the removal of the body, had become imperative. Two days after murdering his friend, he called on a jeweller named M. Arietti and stated that he desired to buy a diamond ring as a present for his fiancée. Not having anything valuable enough in his shop, the jeweller asked the doctor to call later. At the second visit Bougrat chose a handsome solitaire, priced at nine thousand francs. This he carried away on approval, paying with a cheque, but insisting that it was not to be cashed until he returned to say whether his fiancée liked the ring. The name on the cheque was sufficient for the unsuspicious jeweller, who parted with the ring. The next morning Dr. Bougrat called again and returned the trinket with the remark that it had failed to please. He chose instead another for forty-nine thousand francs, leaving the same worthless cheque as deposit. As an afterthought he remarked:

'By the way, monsieur. I am the doctor of the Russian Colony. An old lady, a countess, wishes to sell her jewellery. It is a fine collection, worth at least two hundred thousand francs, but I know that she would take fifty thousand. If you like, you can come to my house this evening. The Countess will be there, and if you bring the money, you can conclude the deal right away.'

The jeweller replied that he had only thirty thousand francs in his safe.

'Never mind,' said the doctor. 'I'll advance the dif-

ference. Better still — I'll tell you what — bring some pearl necklaces for my fiancée to choose from, and what I pay you will make up the sum you need.' Naturally enough, the jeweller was overjoyed, but his wife, who had not fallen under the charm of the doctor's personality, insisted that M. Arietti should take his assistant with him. As soon as the jeweller was in the surgery, Dr. Bougrat asked him to be seated whilst he went to fetch the Countess. In reality, the doctor crept to the front door and carefully examined the street. He at once espied the assistant waiting for his master's return in a cab opposite the house. Thus the projected crime became impossible.

'*We are unlucky*,' said the doctor, when he returned to the surgery; 'the Countess cannot come, but I'll make another appointment for to-morrow.' The next day the jeweller was astounded to learn that the ring had been sold to a colleague for fifteen thousand francs. He immediately presented the doctor's cheque at the bank, and learned that the account was overdrawn. Together with his friend he called at the rue Senac and threatened the doctor with the police. The money had already gone the way of the rest, but upon receiving a signed promise from the doctor agreeing to pay the full amount the next day, the jeweller decided to wait. Desperate, cornered, with arrest staring him in the face, Dr. Bougrat made a last attempt to obtain the money needed for flight. A friend, M. Bonnet, had received fifteen thousand francs that day from an uncle, and was celebrating the windfall at the Café Riche. Dr. Bougrat was one of the party. Whilst they were chatting, a waiter came and informed M. Bonnet, who was well known, that a lady wished to speak to him on the telephone. Much surprised, M. Bonnet rose and went to

the instrument, but the caller had meanwhile rung off. It was later proved that the *lady* was Andrea. Bonnet returned just in time to see Bougrat drop something in his wine. Thoroughly frightened now, Bonnet succeeded in upsetting his glass, to the evident annoyance of the doctor, who left shortly after. It was his last night of freedom; the next morning, when he was already seated in the Paris train, he was arrested on a warrant for uttering bogus cheques, and sent to Chave Prison.

I was with the detectives who searched the flat in the rue Senac, for ugly rumours were now circulating. Nothing unusual was found, and we were about to leave when I happened to pick up a book which was lying on the surgery table. It was a translation by Baudelaire of Edgar Allan Poe's writings. The book was open at the tale of 'The Black Cat,' and the page relating how the body was walled up in the cellar was marked in pencil. Seized with a sudden intuition, I pointed this out to the Sûreté chief. The servants were questioned, and the cook, Fernande, after examining the walls, stated that there had been a recess above the medicine cupboard, but that it was now papered over. Bougrat was at once sent for. Handcuffed, dishevelled, and deadly pale, he was led in by a gendarme.

'Bougrat,' said the chief, 'what have you hidden up there? Is it the body of your friend Rumèbe?'

'No, no,' the doctor yelled hoarsely, starting back; 'there is nothing there.'

'Well, we shall see,' replied M. Robert, and immediately a detective climbed a ladder which had been fetched from the passage and began prizing out the bricks with a hammer and chisel. Wild screams burst from the prisoner as brick after brick was dislodged. In a few minutes the ghastly truth was laid bare. The

recess contained the body of Jacques Rumèbe! Questioned by the *juge d'instruction*, who had been summoned, Bougrat related a fantastic story. His friend had come to him in a terrible state of agitation. He had been robbed of the money he carried to pay the workmen and in despair implored the doctor to lend him the missing sum. Dr. Bougrat had rushed out hoping to borrow it from a friend, but in vain. When he returned he found Rumèbe dying, and by his side was a bottle of cyanide tablets which the unhappy man had taken from the poison cupboard. Terrified at the thought of his own danger, he had at once administered restoratives, but his friend had died in a few minutes. He had thereupon hidden the body in the wall.

'How did you carry the body of a heavy man up the ladder?' the judge asked. 'Some one must have helped you.'

'Oh, no,' was the surprising answer; 'I slung Rumèbe over my shoulder as a hunter carries big game, and crawled up the ladder like a crab.'

The discovery of the body stirred the town to wild excitement. The police had meanwhile taken possession of the flat and arrested the girl Andrea. Whilst we were searching among the papers of the doctor, the door of the laboratory opened a few inches and a sly, bestial face peeped in; it was the Panther come for his monthly wage. At sight of the police, the door instantly slammed shut, but we were after him with a rush. The chase lasted several hours, for the wily creature knew all the runways of the harbour side. We had almost lost him in the dark when we saw a motor-boat glide swiftly towards the open sea. At once we tumbled into a police launch and followed, keeping well hidden in the shadows. We were thus able to land unseen, and watched

DR. BOUGRAT IN THE DOCK

the apache enter a little tumbledown building near the shore. As soon as the reënforcements we had sent for arrived, we surrounded the house and battered down the doors. Lying strapped to a bed we discovered the unfortunate Greek girl, and learned her story. The apache was, of course, arrested, but denied all complicity in the murder of Rumèbe.

Charged with a long list of crimes, but above all with the murder or Rumèbe, who, it was found, had succumbed to an injection of cyanide, Dr. Bougrat made a last attempt whilst in prison to manufacture an alibi. A noted forger named Maurice Bouchard gave evidence at the trial to the effect that he had written two letters at the doctor's request. One in a woman's hand was to prove that Dr. Bougrat had called on the fatal Saturday and asked her to lend him nine thousand francs. The other purported to be from an Algerian who had died in the prison, in which he admitted having attacked and robbed Rumèbe. This evidence was the last straw. The jury found Dr. Bougrat guilty, and sentenced him to be guillotined.

I have just received the news that his sentence has been commuted to deportation to the penal settlements of Cayenne, where Bougrat is to be sent immediately.

Perhaps, as a doctor, he may redeem his evil past by tending his fellow convicts.

October, 1928.

The sequel to this story still remains to be told, for exactly six weeks after his arrival at the penal settlements of French Guinea, Dr. Bougrat succeeded in escaping, together with eleven other convicts who had awaited his coming. The greatest enemy of fugitives in the jungle is a fever which follows on the inevitable

mosquito bites. To combat this, quinine and other drugs are needed. Bougrat, being a doctor, was immediately made an assistant at the Cayenne Infirmary and was thus enabled to steal the indispensable medicines for a successful flight through the forests.

EPISODE IV

THE MYSTERIOUS FOOTPRINTS

'I WISH something truly interesting would come along once in a while,' M. Dufresne said to me one morning. 'Really, crime is very monotonous. What is it, after all? The taking of life or property, and even that can be condensed again and called the taking of something from someone. Bah!' and my chief yawned with obvious ill-humour.

'I agree with you,' I replied, amused at his pessimistic summing-up. 'But you forget that it's not what is done, but how and by whom. Surely you don't complain of lack of variety. I have just been going through the police archives, in order to classify all cases which have points in common, and I assure you that there are very few which can be entered under the same heading. Professor La Marra, for instance, was only a murderer — but what a strange type!'

'Well, all right; we see things differently. Now, this morning we have to go to Saint-Germain. A girl has been strangled. I'll wager it will be just a commonplace sex drama or else suicide. Come along, get your implements; I have a car waiting. We'll lunch at some pretty country restaurant. It's a fine day, that's one comfort. Rousseau is already there. Saint-Germain is noted for its wine-cellars; trust him not to miss such an opportunity. He calls it getting evidence!'

When I came down from the laboratories, a big police automobile was vibrating with the restrained energy of its powerful engine at the door of the dingy Sûreté head-

quarters, and we were soon roaring through the suburbs of Paris towards the countryside.

The house where the dead girl had been found was on the outskirts of the extensive forest for which Saint-Germain is famous. It was a large place, standing in spacious grounds and surrounded by enormous gnarled oaks. Rousseau met us at the iron gates.

'I've not touched anything, monsieur,' he said, saluting M. Dufresne. 'The case is too strange, and needs a better brain than mine. This way' — and he led us along winding flower-bordered paths until we came to the house itself. In front of this was a wide lawn with several ancient spreading trees on one side. Two gendarmes were guarding the path, and we could see the huddled body of a girl with long golden hair lying on her face just under the largest of the trees.

'The doctor telephoned to say that she had been strangled,' said my chief. 'What is there strange about that?'

'Nothing, except that there have been heavy showers the last two days; the ground is not gravel, but a soft clay soil, yet there are no signs of any footsteps other than the dead girl's. She is the sister-in-law of M. Harrison.'

'What, the famous trainer?' M. Dufresne asked in surprise.

'Yes; the girl and his wife are English, but M. Harrison is an American. The body was found this morning by a servant. His footprints can be seen crossing the lawn as far as the edge of the path. He ran back at once and alarmed the household, and M. Harrison allowed no one but the doctor to approach her.'

'When did she die?'

'Dr. Maupert thinks that it was before midnight.

She has been strangled by huge hands. I've obtained some boards, so that we can approach without making any marks on the soft path.'

'Bien; then call the doctor. I'll examine the ground.'

We walked carefully along the planks to the body, which was that of quite a young girl, certainly not more than twenty. She was not very tall, and there was a slight deformity near her shoulders as though she had suffered from a twisted spine.

We at once perceived the traces of the girl's small pointed shoes. She had evidently been strolling slowly and aimlessly, judging by the short steps, until she arrived at the tree. There her footsteps ceased suddenly.

'Look at the last imprints,' my chief cried excitedly. 'Only the toes can be seen, but they pressed deeply into the ground, and are quite close together, as though she had stood on tiptoe. What does that mean?'

A thick branch which jutted out over the path just above the body attracted my attention. 'It looks as though she had been seized from above and lifted by the throat,' I answered.

M. Dufresne turned to the doctor. 'You say she was strangled by hands, not by a rope, Dr. Maupert?'

'There is no doubt about that,' the doctor replied emphatically. 'Huge, muscular fingers have left deep bruises. Look for yourself.'

Since there was nothing to be gained by remaining where we were, we approached the body, taking care not to step on any footprint. M. Dufresne scrutinised the girl for a long time, then he looked at the knotted limb above her.

'Quite impossible, your theory,' he said to me. 'The branch is at least twelve feet from the ground. Even if

the murderer let himself dangle from his knees he could never have reached the girl.'

'No — unless he was hanging by a rope.'

M. Dufresne grunted impatiently. 'Get to work with your cameras; Rousseau shall fence off that piece of ground. Then I'll see this Harrison and afterwards I'll 'phone M. Bertillon. It serves me right for grumbling this morning. This case is certainly strange and interesting enough; but if, as you think, the criminal climbed into the tree and lay in wait above the path, there will be plenty of signs of his presence on the bark and among the smaller twigs. He could not have held the poor girl without swaying and slipping, and our microscopes will soon settle that question. Don't let anyone approach that oak, Rousseau.'

The old Brigadier nodded, and gave orders to the gendarmes to fetch ropes and wooden stakes. My own work was quickly done, and, leaving my cameras, I walked to the house, where I saw my chief in animated conversation with several people. Foremost among these was Jim Harrison, the famous trainer. He was holding a slim woman, who was sobbing bitterly in his arms, and alternately trying to soothe her in English and shouting at my chief in almost unintelligible French.

When M. Dufresne saw me, he waved his hand eagerly.

'I do not understand this man,' he said, shrugging his shoulders with a helpless gesture. 'Please translate my questions and his answers. What is it he is trying to say?'

I turned to the American. 'My chief would like you to tell me what you know about this tragedy.'

'Say, are you English?' he shouted at once. 'Well, I guess that's some smart of the police. I was beginning

to think they were hopeless. This is a dreadful, damnable business. My poor, poor little harmless Daphne — to be murdered in such a foul manner by a beast. There, there, sweetheart' — as his wife burst into a convulsive fit of crying.

'You see, Daphne was a cripple until two years ago, when Father Duvernois, the parish priest, advised her to try Lourdes. A wonderful place, though I'm not a religious man myself. She came back cured, except for a little lump below the shoulders.'

'Yes, yes,' Monsieur Dufresne said when I had translated; 'but we want to know about the crime. Have you any idea who killed her?'

'I have, but you won't believe me! She was not killed by a man at all. My neighbour, M. Cadoudal, has a great big chimpanzee who is always roaming about in the woods ——'

'Nonsense!' my chief interrupted. 'A chimpanzee is a small animal, and not at all dangerous. It could never have strangled the girl. So that's what he has been trying to tell me! Who is this M. Cadoudal?'

'Say, he's all right — a fine man, but I don't like his pets. His father was an animal trainer and left them to him ——'

'The father is dead, then?'

'Nope — in an asylum near here. Got bitten by a big cat — a puma, I think — and went mad.'

'Will you tell us as clearly as you can all that happened last night?'

'Sure — I played pelote with M. Cadoudal till eight — he's a Basque from the Pyrenees. Then after dinner Daphne said she'd go for a little walk. She often walked in the garden in the evening when there was a full moon like last night. We have a big Malemute I brought back

from the Klondike. His name is Toto, and we always thought him to be sufficient protection for the little girl. Father Duvernois was here — but lately Daphne and him haven't hit it off well, and when he offered to go with her, she said no, and went and fetched Toto. About eleven Father Duvernois left. He stopped to talk a minute with Daphne in the rose garden ——'

'How do you know?'

'Because he told me so when he came this morning as soon as he heard what had happened. We thought Daphne had gone to bed before twelve, for we heard her door shut and Toto howling from his kennel. He does that sometimes when he's chained up. It wasn't till this morning, when the gardener Jules came running, that we knew what had happened' — and at the words the big man wiped his eyes and blew his nose noisily.

'What makes you speak of the monkey, then?' my chief inquired.

'Because I telephoned to my friend Cadoudal when I saw that there were no other footmarks than those of poor Daphne ——'

'You noticed that?'

'Sure — I used to hunt a lot up North. Footprints were the first thing I looked for; that's why I let no one go near the body. Cadoudal admitted that Jim Jim — that's the monkey — had been out all the evening. Can we carry poor Daphne into the house now?'

'Wait a little longer, please. I want M. Bertillon to find everything untouched when he comes. I will use your telephone now, if I may.'

An hour later the great criminologist arrived on the scene and began his investigation. The branch overhanging the path was minutely examined, but there

were no marks of any kind on the bark nor on the tree. Only one little shred of evidence did we find which seemed to confirm the trainer's theory. A handful of brown, woolly fur was hanging from a jagged stump jutting out just above the first limb. M. Bertillon detached this carefully and placed it in a small box, but said nothing. The bruises on the girl's throat appeared to puzzle him, and a tracing was made of them. Finally he remarked: 'We will go and interview this Cadoudal now. The body can be moved. There is nothing more we can do here.'

As we walked towards Cadoudal's house, the grounds of which adjoined those of the trainer, Bertillon slipped his arm under Rousseau's with a friendly gesture.

'Now, Brigadier, I've heard that the wine in Saint-Germain is very good. What have you discovered?'

Rousseau looked embarrassed for a moment, then with a shrewd glance at his chief he said:

'Only rumours as yet, monsieur. The dead girl had quarrelled with the priest — and people say there was some scandal; but so far I've nothing more precise.'

'Very well; then go along and see if you can find out what the trouble was about between the priest and the girl. I also want you to make inquiries about a one-legged man. He has a round stump in place of his right foot. I imagine that he does not belong to Saint-Germain.'

Rousseau at once trotted off towards the path leading to the town.

We were all startled at this unexpected order, for we had seen no signs of such a man anywhere.

'Then you think that the chimpanzee had nothing to do with the crime?' M. Dufresne asked in surprise,

for the finding of the fur had shaken his first opinion. M. Bertillon halted and pulled out the box containing the handful of hair.

'Look at this,' he said. 'I'll wager that when I examine it at the laboratory I shall not find a single root-bulb. It's dead; by that I mean it is fur which has been torn from a coat. It never came from a living body. I should not be surprised if we find that it was placed in the tree purposely to mislead us.'

M. Cadoudal, a tall, swarthy man with the features of a Spaniard, was lying in a basket-lounge when we arrived. He appeared pale and ill. Near him, squatting on the ground, and attached by a heavy chain, was a huge, full-grown male chimpanzee.

M. Cadoudal held out his hand to M. Bertillon.

'Pardon me, messieurs, if I do not rise. I have a bad attack of malaria to-day. I often suffer from it. There is Jim Jim. I know what my friend Harrison thinks, but Jim Jim would not hurt a fly. Sheer nonsense.'

'Can you call a servant to hold him?' M. Bertillon asked. 'I wish to measure his arms and hands.'

Although the anthropoid chattered angrily and struggled to get away, he did not once attempt to bite whilst Bertillon made careful measurements of the body and arms and obtained impressions of the strangely human hands with their long nails. When Madame Cadoudal, a pretty little woman, whose grey eyes and red hair made a strange contrast to the sunburned appearance of her husband, came running from the house and patted and stroked Jim Jim, he quieted down immediately and became as docile as a child. After Bertillon had questioned M. Cadoudal and his wife at some length, we returned at once to headquarters, and waited in his office while he went to examine the fur taken from the

tree. He came back almost at once and motioned us to seats.

'You see,' he began thoughtfully, 'the ape had nothing to do with the crime. This is goat's hair, perhaps from a chauffeur's coat. You all noticed the long nails of the chimpanzee, yet the skin on the poor girl's neck was not even scratched, quite apart from the fact that the branch was much too high for the ape to reach anyone so short as this Mademoiselle Daphne. No; the murderer knows both families well, and also knows of Harrison's dislike for Jim Jim, and left that fur purposely.'

'But the one-legged man?' Dufresne asked. 'How did you find out about him?'

'His tracks were all along the grassy bank behind the tree. A rope may have been dropped over the girl's body, and she was then pulled up to where the murderer was crouching. I don't know yet — we must wait for Rousseau.'

Late in the afternoon Rousseau came into my office and sat down with feigned nonchalance. I could see that he was holding himself in check with difficulty.

When I put my instrument down, he leaned forward and growled:

'What a genius Bertillon is! I found out all about the one-legged man. He is an ex-Zouave — lost his foot in Morocco. Two years in the penal battalions for wounding a comrade. Apache, burglar, and worse. He's been hanging about Harrison's place for days, and there are others with him. He bought some meat at a horse butcher's yesterday, and several poisoned pellets have been picked up near that big Alaskan dog's kennel. Probably tried to get rid of him.'

'What does the chief say?' I asked.

'Says I did well, but I think he's puzzled. He can't see any motive for the crime — nothing was stolen. But I've discovered something that may supply the motive. Father Duvernois is in love with Madame Cadoudal — and the dead girl knew of it and had quarrelled with the priest.'

'Oh, you mean he might have hired this apache to kill Mademoiselle Daphne?'

The Brigadier nodded. 'I'm off now to watch the fellow. For the moment we are marking time, but the records are at work on the past of all these people.'

He nodded and withdrew, and I shelved the whole matter, believing that days would pass before anything further happened.

I was hardly awake the next morning when to my astonishment Rousseau came pounding on my door. He was tremendously excited, and shouted, 'Come along, hurry now — both Harrison and his wife have been killed.'

'What?' I yelled, seizing the Brigadier by the arm. 'When did it happen?'

'I don't know. I've been on the trail of the apaches all night; haven't been to bed. Dufresne and Bertillon are waiting.'

A crowd surrounded the gates of the unfortunate trainer's house when we arrived, and a cordon of police had much trouble in keeping them back. A servant, shivering and babbling with excitement, led us into the dwelling.

'In the wine-cellars, messieurs,' he gasped. 'Madame is there — poor, poor lady.'

The cellar was a vast place lit by two electric bulbs. Along both sides were bins filled with bottles, and at one end several vats loomed dimly. On the stone floor

in front of one of the bins was the little woman we had seen crying so bitterly the day before. She was lying on her face, her tousled hair spread out on both sides of her shoulders. Near her was a wicker basket and two broken bottles which had probably contained Burgundy. A dark pool of this had formed near her outstretched hand and soaked into the ground.

'Taken by surprise whilst fetching some wine,' Bertillon muttered, gazing around. Suddenly he uttered a wild cry of surprise and terror and pointed with shaking hand at the white ceiling.

'Look, look,' he called shrilly. 'What devil's work is this? *There are footprints on the ceiling!*'

A shiver of superstitious fear ran down my spine at the words, and for a long minute we all stood staring spellbound at the incredible sight. Beside an iron girder, running the full length of the vault, were several clear imprints of a naked foot!

'Ten feet from the ground, at least,' M. Dufresne groaned. 'Is it conceivable that anyone or any animal can walk on a ceiling like a fly? This is ghastly.'

We were still gazing, too astounded to move, when a hoarse bellow from Rousseau completed our terror.

'The ape, the ape — there by the window, Chief!' Our eyes followed the direction of his pointing finger, and for a second we had a fleeting vision of a bestial simian face grimacing through the dusty glass of a tiny barred window at the extreme end of the cellar.

'After him! Catch him!' Dufresne yelled. 'But don't shoot — we must clear up this mystery.'

Rousseau clattered up the stone steps and disappeared. Bertillon turned to his colleague with a puzzled frown; his wonted calm was returning rapidly, but I saw that he was pale and shaken.

'We are foolish, mon cher,' he said, 'to suppose even for an instant that the anthropoid ape we saw yesterday did this. The idea is absurd. A gorilla, now, would kill a human being, but not a chimpanzee. No, some clever scoundrel has hit on a novel method for laying a false trail. I'll find him, if it's the last thing I do. Let's get to work. Send several of your men to watch the Cadoudal house and grounds. We will investigate here first. Where is the trainer's body?'

'That was found in a field near a tall tree. Harrison was fully dressed and lying on his side with his dog beside him. The man had been strangled, but the dog's head was crushed by a heavy blow. Colbert reported that there are no signs anywhere of a human presence. Several police are guarding the place. Harrison had a gun with him, and Colbert believes that the trainer went in search of the creature responsible for these killings and was attacked from behind.'

At that moment Rousseau returned. 'It could not have been the ape, monsieur,' he exclaimed, 'for I went as far as Cadoudal's house and saw it there, chained up and feeding.'

'And was M. Cadoudal there also?'

'Yes, lying in the sun on a basket-lounge. He looked ill. I had no instructions, so I did not show myself.'

'Quite right; we'll go there later. Call the doctor and let's have his opinion. Measure and photograph these footprints. In fact, let us act normally. Hang it! Are we to be tricked like children?'

It was the first time I had seen the great criminologist really angry. No doubt the shock to his nerves had much to do with it, but I knew also that he would now work night and day until the mysterious murderer was discovered.

After an hour's feverish labours, M. Bertillon looked at me and smiled.

'You see how wrong it is to jump to conclusions. There is a space between the girder and the roof, and in the dust are marks like clutching fingers and several broad spaces where the dust has been completely wiped off. They were made by some weird creature with prehensile feet who has used the girder to hang from, head downwards, pressing with one foot against the ceiling once or twice for purchase whilst moving along with a leg thrown over the narrow iron. I would not have believed that it could be done had I not seen these traces myself.'

'What kind of creature, monsieur?' Dufresne asked.

'I cannot say yet. The footprints appear to be human, yet only a gorilla could hang by his feet like that. Come, let us go to the field where the trainer is lying. What of the woman, Dr. Maupert?'

'Lifted and strangled, just like the sister.'

'Very well; we can do nothing further here.'

We found Harrison lying in a meadow. On his neck were large blue bruises; the Alaskan dog was stretched at full length on the opposite side of the tree, its head smashed by a terrific blow.

Bertillon's sharp eyes picked out several minute marks in the dust. Plaster casts were immediately taken of these. They had been made by naked feet, of which the sides only had touched the ground.

'Those are an ape's footprints, surely?' I asked my chief, but he only shrugged his shoulders impatiently and led the way to Cadoudal's house.

We found the owner still resting on a couch in the sun. He appeared more pale and languid even than on the previous day.

'This is a terrible thing,' were his first words. 'Here I am, utterly helpless, whilst my best friends are being murdered. Can I assist you in any way?'

'Yes — I should be glad if you would answer a few questions, and then I desire to see all your servants and your wife. What pets have you besides Jim Jim, the chimpanzee? You haven't a gorilla?'

'Good Heavens, no! They can't be kept in captivity. I have a puma; the same animal which bit my father. Also several dogs and a tame bear.'

'The chimpanzee is often allowed to roam about your grounds. Was he free an hour ago?'

'No, he has been unusually excited lately. A full moon is his worst time, and he has been chained up since yesterday.'

'Thank you. Now call the servants, please.'

Cadoudal struck a bell standing on a small table. In answer a swarthy, hairy fellow came gliding from the house. His tread was soft and noiseless, and he approached obliquely like a cat. There was something extremely repulsive about the man, and the unpleasant impression he produced was heightened by the manner in which his tiny beady eyes flickered from one to the other of us, observant, yet never coming to rest.

'This is Matteo Bassao,' Cadoudal said. 'He is a Basque like myself, and has been with me for years.'

'Take your shoes off,' Bertillon snapped, 'and your socks. I want to see your feet.'

The fellow complied at once. His feet were small and narrow, and were obviously not those which had left their imprint in the cellar. The questions which M. Bertillon put to the other servants were of no help whatever. Whichever way we turned we came to a blank wall.

'If I could only find a motive,' Bertillon said to me; 'but Cadoudal and Harrison were great friends, so were the women. What the devil does it all mean?' Suddenly he smashed his fist into his open palm. 'The asylum — of course! Come along. Perhaps we'll find the solution there.' I failed to grasp my chief's meaning, but there were times when his brain worked in a manner beyond our understanding. Giving terse orders to the driver, Bertillon climbed into the car, leaving Dufresne and Rousseau on watch. The famous private asylum of Dr. Carmagne was soon reached, and the director greeted his distinguished visitor with obvious awe.

'You have the father of M. Cadoudal here,' Bertillon at once cried, waiving polite greetings. 'He was formerly Hagenbeck's greatest animal trainer, was he not? What are the characteristics of his madness?'

Dr. Carmagne looked startled. 'He is a dangerous homicidal maniac.'

'Animal tendencies?'

'Yes. We have to be careful how we approach him. He bites and tries to throttle the attendants at certain periods.'

'His worst time is when the moon is full, I suppose? Are his feet prehensile?'

'They are, M. Bertillon. How did you know? You've never seen him. Furthermore, he is also, as you suggest, a somnambulist, and at his worst at the full moon.'

'Are you certain he cannot get out of his cell?' Bertillon asked, pointing an accusing finger at the doctor.

'Absolutely certain. He is always watched. His cell is padded and the window barred; and at the approach of full moon we generally put a strait-jacket on him.'

My chief nodded; but there was a gleam in his eyes

which I knew well. 'Are you sure that his madness was caused by the bite from the puma?'

'No; but it caused an outbreak of acute mania. Until then the man had only been — well — eccentric.'

'Thank you, doctor; that is all I wished to know.'

'You do not suspect us of negligence, monsieur, surely?'

'Oh, no, doctor. Pardon my abrupt manner. It is a bad habit when I am following an idea that has not yet formed.'

We left the asylum and Bertillon ordered me to return to my colleague.

'Tell Rousseau to hide and watch the Cadoudal house,' he said. 'I shall return soon. You'd better go to the hotel of the Clefs d'Or with M. Dufresne and dine there, then wait for me at dusk at the local police station.'

Dufresne was frankly puzzled when I related our visit to the asylum, but his faith in the great criminologist was so profound that he never thought to question his decisions. We spent the rest of the day discussing the case.

Night had completely come when Bertillon drove up to the commissaire's office. His car was crowded with armed police, and other cars carrying gendarmes with rifles were close behind. I saw that two police dogs had also been brought. M. Bertillon had hardly entered when there was a loud outcry in the street and a man dressed in rough forester's clothes, and followed by a woman, came pushing his way excitedly into the police station.

The man was livid and held one hand tightly clutched to his throat, whilst the woman was sobbing and shaking with terror, her dilated eyes looking from one to the

other of us with an unseeing stare. It was some minutes before we could obtain a coherent statement from either of them.

'Two wild animals attacked me, monsieur. Two huge hairy apes as big as bears. They jumped from a tree when I was coming home and nearly strangled me. I am a woodcutter, and luckily I had my axe. Oh, it was terrible. I struck at the one in front of me and cut his arm, and at that the other let go of my throat and sprang at the one I wounded. I ran and ran — for ever so long, and at last I came to my house. My wife was on her knees praying when I came in. She says she saw it all in a vision.'

'What nonsense is this?' the commissaire barked, shaking the man roughly. 'If you were attacked far from home, how could your wife see it?'

'Oh, but she did, monsieur, she did. Ask her.'

The woman related that she was preparing the supper for her husband's return and had carried the lamp into the kitchen. It was while she was laying the table in their living-room that she was startled by a terrible snarling cry. The sound was so awful that she had not the courage to turn to shut the door which led into the wood. Suddenly a round light appeared on the wall in front of her and, although the room was pitch dark, she saw her husband struggling in the grip of two great hairy monsters. It was like a horrible nightmare. She saw him swing his axe, and then in sheer terror she fell to the ground in a faint.

She had just recovered and was on her knees praying for her man, when he came stumbling in.

'Your back was to the door, you say?' M. Dufresne asked the terrified woman, 'and what was in front of you?'

'The wall, sir — just the wall — but I saw it all. The two devils sprang from a big tree. I remember that I noticed one of its branches was broken and hung down, touching the ground.'

M. Dufresne looked doubtfully at the commissaire, but the latter merely shrugged his shoulders and touched his forehead significantly. During this by-play Bertillon had been walking up and down the room, deep in thought. Suddenly he looked up and I saw that all indecision had vanished from his eyes.

'All right,' he said sharply. 'We won't stop to discuss this matter now. Come along, all of you — but go softly when we get to the forest. We are hunting big game to-night. The man and woman had better remain here.'

The wood was like a dark cavern, only now and then did the light of the moon filter through the thick roof of leaves. Twice we took the wrong path and only found the woodcutter's house at last by the merest chance, for the woman had extinguished her lamp before leaving. M. Bertillon pushed the door open and entered the tiny living-room. A heavy axe was lying on a chair; the edge was blood-stained, and some hairs were still adhering to it.

'His story is true then, but what about his wife's vision? By Jove, look!' and Bertillon pointed to the glass door of a cupboard in which the full moon was reflected through a gap in the trees. One of the branches of a beech just in front of the house was broken and dangled to the ground. 'She saw it in that glass, which, with the dark curtain behind it, makes an excellent mirror. The attack must have taken place outside this hut, and the fellow was so terrified that he ran away from his home instead of towards it. We're in luck.

Bring the dogs to the tree; they'll pick up the trail.'

The two big sheep-dogs which had been brought by one of the gendarmes were led forward. They ran around the beech several times, noses to the ground, and then started off, whining softly. Orders had been given that no lights were to be used, and it was difficult and unpleasant work advancing through the tangled shrubbery. Thorns whipped and tore at our hands and faces, creepers twisted round our legs, and fallen logs and deep holes caused a man to fall with a rending crash at every moment. I was glad that we were a numerous company and well armed, for the thought of some uncanny beast suddenly dropping on me from a tree made me shiver. Several times we heard dogs barking and men shouting in the distance, and the sound made our hearts beat convulsively. We had stumbled on through the gloom for perhaps half an hour when our dogs stopped and raised their heads, sniffing in an agitated manner. We were in a clearing and not far away was a large house.

'Cadoudal,' Bertillon whispered to me; then, turning to the police holding the dogs, 'Unleash them and follow at a run.'

The instant the heavy thongs were slipped from their collars the dogs started forward. We had not expected them to disappear so quickly, and raced after them, sliding and falling over broken branches. Suddenly a horrible gurgling scream rose in a long undulation, followed by frantic barking and a short, staccato bellow that sounded like distant thunder.

'Help — help!' came in Rousseau's voice, and two sharp reports from a heavy pistol added to the uproar. Panting with the exertion of our race through the wood, we came upon a scene which I shall never forget. Rous-

seau and the two dogs were struggling with a snarling, biting, whirling form which threw them hither and thither as though they were rats, whilst a few feet away a long, dark, fur-covered shape lay sprawling in an ungainly heap on the path.

Again Rousseau's pistol spat redly, just as a gendarme sprang forward and seized the dogs by their collars. The creature they had been attacking fell to the ground in a frenzied, furious convulsion as we came up, and I saw that it was the chimpanzee. Rousseau, pale and shaken, pointed with trembling hands at the motionless form on the path. Bertillon stooped over it and directed the rays of his torch at the head, and we saw with horror that it was Cadoudal, dressed in a complete tight-fitting garment of dark fur, which made him akin to his companion the ape. Lights were now flashing from the house, and people came running.

'Keep his wife away,' Bertillon ordered. 'She mustn't see him like this.' Then he knelt and raised the man's head. As he did so the eyes opened, and Cadoudal stared at us with a vacant, plaintive expression.

'What has happened?' he groaned. 'I feel ill. I've had another dreadful nightmare. Oh, God! When will they cease?'

It was visible that the man had only a moment to live. One of Rousseau's shots had pierced a lung, and as we lifted him his head fell back with a last gurgling moan. Bertillon wrapped the body in a long overcoat, which hid his strange fur garments, and ordered two gendarmes to carry him to the house. The chimpanzee had only received a scalp wound, and was already recovering. We tied his hands and feet, and after washing the wound, locked him in a stable.

Madame Cadoudal met us on the stairs. One look at

her told us that she knew the reason for the tragedy.

'Tell me that he is dead,' she moaned, stretching out appealing hands. 'Oh, my love, my love, how I have prayed that he should never know the truth.'

'He died without knowing what had happened, madame,' said M. Bertillon sternly, 'but we must ask you to tell us what you know, for there have been dreadful crimes committed, and by your silence you have become his accomplice.'

But for the moment the woman was incapable of understanding what was being said. She had followed me into the room in which the police had placed the body, and threw herself with a wild, agonised moan to her knees beside it, caressing the dank black hair and kissing the cold mouth. With a start I saw that Matteo, the unpleasant servant with the shifty eyes, had silently entered the room. He bent over the sobbing woman and said in a deep voice that was hoarse with emotion:

'Come, madame, God has been good and spared him the knowledge of his dreadful inheritance. These dogs don't understand; do not let them see your pain. I can hear their handcuffs jangling.'

Then, turning on us with a snarl which showed two long yellow fangs, he spat rather than said: 'What is it you want to know? I'll tell you all, so long as you leave my poor mistress in peace. Yes, my master was mad — cursed with the same animal taint as his father. By day he was the kindest, best of men, but at night — when the full moon shone — he became a monster, an ape, such a creature as man probably was a million years ago. But he never harmed anyone, and he never knew what he did, but thought only that he dreamed of nights. We couldn't bear the thought of shutting him in an asylum, and so it was my duty to lock him in his room

when the fit seized him. Nothing would ever have happened but for the unhappy chance that I fell ill. He discovered how to open his window, and began to roam in the forest with Jim Jim.'

'But you must have known that it was he who strangled your neighbours?' Bertillon asked gently.

'We believed at first that they had been killed by some ruffians with whom there was a horrible one-legged man,' Matteo replied, softened by Bertillon's obvious sympathy. 'They had been seen loitering in the neighbourhood and spying on us for nearly a week. It was only yesterday that we began to suspect what really had happened. Even then we hoped and prayed that we were mistaken. Why my master, who was so kind and gentle, should have had such a fearful curse laid on him, I cannot tell. Perhaps it is the price he paid for a great sin committed in a past life. We Basques are an ancient race, and once held all Africa under our rule. Who can measure the power of the Evil One, monsieur? Master never willingly murdered his best friends, for he was like a big brother to poor, crippled Daphne. I had locked him in his room again to-night, but he broke down the door and got away.'

'What happened, Rousseau?' Bertillon asked, turning to my colleague.

'I was watching the house, monsieur, when suddenly two frightful roaring beasts broke out of the bushes and rushed towards me, followed by the dogs. It was only when the bigger of the two sprang at my throat that I saw it was a man, but I saw also by the insane glare in his eyes that it was his life or mine, so I fired. I didn't know you were so near.'

'I quite understand, Rousseau; you are not to blame. Did the ape attack you, too?'

'Yes; he appeared to be wounded in one arm, and at first he only screamed and chattered, but when I fired at — at — M. Cadoudal, he turned and leapt at me, but the dogs had got him by the legs.'

'Then the anthropoid will have to be destroyed immediately. Where did your master get that strange hairy garment, Matteo?'

'I saw it to-night for the first time, monsieur; he must have made it in secret from goatskins.'

'Well, you must come with us, and your mistress also. The judge will decide whether you have committed a crime or not.'

But Matteo and Madame Cadoudal were never sent to prison. The unfortunate wife died a week later from brain fever, and when Matteo learned of the death of his mistress, he committed suicide by swallowing a tablet of poison which he had hidden in his hair.

EPISODE V

THE CASE OF THE TATTOOED MEN

I ARRIVED at the steep stairs leading to the technical police laboratories just as those detectives who had been on duty all night were leaving for a welcome spell of rest after making their report. The first one to greet me was my old friend Rousseau. He looked tired, and his eyes were red from want of sleep.

'I have been waiting for you,' he growled. 'The chief has asked me to take you to the avenue du Roule before I go off duty. So hurry up and get your "conjuror's box"; you'll find me at the Café du Palais. I'm thirsty — very, and black coffee, with something strong in it, will help me to finish my full twenty-four hours.'

I whistled thoughtfully. 'Twenty-four hours, you say — without sleep! Something big, then, eh? What do you want me to bring?'

'I don't know about big — just a curious case. You'll want your Bertillon outfit and an assistant with cameras. I'll tell you about it as we drive there. Shall I order something for you at the café?'

'No, I'll come right over with a car and pick you up.'

Ten minutes later, I hailed my colleague, who was hurriedly refreshing himself, and we settled down for the long drive to the suburb he had named.

I had taken one of the compact little cases invented by our chief, which contained everything useful for an investigation, the 'conjuror's box,' as Rousseau familiarly called it; whilst my assistant, seated beside the driver, carried cameras and magnesium lamp.

'Now, old friend, what is it?' I asked curiously.

'Oh, a fellow has been poisoned. He was found in that cut-throat place called the Hôtel Malher. The doctor is there waiting for us. Strangely enough, I've been watching the place for a week now, because we have had some bad reports about it. This morning, about four o'clock, a woman rushed out shrieking for help. We were inside, Louys and I, before La Chouanne, a horrible, ferocious Algerian woman, who owns the place, could slam the door. Even then some of the beauties who make the hotel their headquarters would have thrown us out, but we had several cycle police handy. Unfortunately, the sudden alarm was unexpected, and, by the time we obtained reënforcements, most of the inmates had disappeared. The place has a dozen convenient exits. In a room at the top of the house we found a man lying on the floor. He was naked to the waist and covered with an extraordinary network of tattooing. Quite dead, too — poisoned, I think. The strange part is that a piece of skin about four inches square has been cut from his back. By the appearance of the wound, the beastly work had been done only minutes previously. The chief thinks that some sign, or the mark of a secret society, has been torn away. The man's whole body is covered with the most fantastic symbols. Obviously he was once in the African penal battalions ——'

'Biribi?' I exclaimed.

'Yes, of course, Biribi or the Bat d'Af; where they send those who've committed a crime before they were due for military service. Such tattooing is a mania with them.'

'What poison was used, and who was the woman who gave the alarm?' I queried.

'The doctor will probably know the poison; as for

the woman, she is a decent little dressmaker, so far as I have been able to ascertain. Here we are.'

I looked out and saw that the car had drawn up before a large, dingy, squalid hotel. On each side were narrow alleys admirably adapted for an escape from the back doors and windows. The place had once been a private dwelling and was centuries old. Now the large black letters across the frontage proclaimed it to be the 'Hôtel Malher. Wedding dinners and fêtes a speciality.'

In a tiny room under the roof, where two uniformed police stood on guard, a man sprawled face down on the grimy boards. He was clad only in baggy trousers and ragged shoes; but under him were the half of a shirt and vest, of which the upper part had been ripped away exposing the arms and back. Curious childish designs in blue and red covered the man's body, but just between the shoulders a square of purple flesh streaked with blood showed where a piece of skin had been cut and torn out.

'You see,' said Rousseau, 'the lines of coagulated blood prove that the man was not dead when this brutal act was committed, but no doubt he was already unconscious.'

My first care was to take imprints of the dead man's hands. Then when a photograph of the room and the body had been made, the doctor turned the fellow over and examined him attentively.

Rousseau's opinion was confirmed — the man had been killed by the absorption of some violent poison. The twisted face proclaimed that its action had been almost instantaneous, but for the moment the doctor was unable to say what the poison was. A broken glass which had rolled under the bed was carefully packed. We hoped that an analysis of the liquid it had contained,

of which a sticky residue still adhered to the inside, would reveal traces of the deadly drug. Meanwhile, Rousseau had been thoughtfully studying the table and chairs.

'I imagine there were three or four people present when the crime was committed,' he said, pointing to the empty bottles and glasses, 'and they were friends of the dead man. These rooms generally contain only one chair. The others were fetched for the meeting or carouse which took place. We'll see from which rooms they were obtained.'

The landlady, a bold, handsome Algerian, whose cunning, beady eyes belied the friendliness of her oily ingratiating manner, was waiting on the landing as we came out. Rousseau gave sharp orders to the police, who at once seized her firmly by the arms and held her there while we hurriedly entered room after room. Two of them lacked chairs, but the indignant proprietress asserted vehemently that the rooms had not been occupied the previous night. She volunteered the statement that the murdered man had only arrived the day before and had taken a room for himself and the girl who had given the alarm. She suggested, viciously, that it was probably his sweetheart who had killed the fellow, since none of her usual tenants were capable of such a wicked deed. At this sally Rousseau merely shrugged his shoulders, for he was well aware of the kind of brutes who usually sought refuge in the infamous hotel. Although we harassed her with questions, the woman answered them so cleverly that we realised it was useless to insist, and in despair Rousseau finally ordered La Chouanne to be taken to headquarters where an examining magistrate would formally interrogate her. We then left together, after placing an officer on guard in the

room, and I immediately made my report to M. Bertillon.

A photograph of the dead man was circulated at the Sûreté, and Sergeant Moreau, a police officer who had served many years in Africa, informed Dufresne that the picture resembled a former African soldier and desperado named Jules Brique, who had been a noted 'Zephir,' as the worst types among the soldiers in the penal battalions are nicknamed. Brique had been in the road gangs at Kenifra in Morocco when Sergeant Moreau was there. He remembered vaguely that some rumour had circulated about the escape of Brique and several cronies, but that they had been recaptured by Arab military police, and court-martialled. A search of the records proved Moreau to be right. The strangely tattooed man was indeed Jules Brique. He had been sentenced for highway robbery before he was twenty and consequently sent to Biribi when the time for military service came, since in France a criminal cannot serve in the regular army. M. Bertillon thoughtfully studied the enlarged photographs which I had made of the tattooing, and compared them one by one with those which the police had taken when the man was first arrested.

'Most of these designs were added later,' he said finally. 'The earlier photographs show that there was a blank space just at the spot where the skin has been cut away. Whatever the marks were which the man or men who killed Brique were anxious to destroy, they were the result of something which happened whilst he was in Morocco. The girl who ran screaming into the street declares that she had known the man only about a year. She insists that he was steady, hard-working, and honest. But he never stayed long in the same neigh-

bourhood. They had moved constantly from one hotel to another, as though Brique had lived in perpetual fear of an enemy. The room in which the man was found was not theirs, for they had lived on the floor below. The night of the tragedy they had returned early. Towards morning she had been suddenly roused from deep sleep by the sound of a heavy fall and a loud groan. Terrified and only half awake, she had struck a match and instantly realised that she was alone. The girl had thereupon rushed upstairs and entered the room from which she thought the noise had come. To her horror she saw her companion lying on the floor as we found him. The door of the room was wide open, but she had seen no one else nor heard any further sound. It was then that she had run into the street and called wildly for help.

'A mysterious business,' M. Bertillon concluded. 'What have you found?'

'A few finger-prints, but they are not clear and single ones at that,' I replied, showing my chief some gelatine transfers.

'Well, we must wait. This hotel is a veritable den of murderers and thieves. Rousseau and Colbert have been regularly on duty in the vicinity. We have nevertheless released the Algerian woman. I wish to give them rope enough. If you are not busy, you may go and keep your friends company.'

For several days and nights the hotel was always under observation, and we carefully noted the many sinister ruffians who permanently loafed about the alleys or drank in the long dimly lit taproom. The doctor had reported that the poison in the wine the man had drunk was unknown to him, nor was the Sûreté analyst, Lebrun, able to identify it. Dufresne finally decided to

raid the Hôtel Malher, since we had obtained no further results, when one morning M. Bertillon requested me to come to his office immediately. I found him in consultation with two of the river police.

'Here is another link in the chain,' he said, the moment I entered. 'I have sent a messenger to fetch Rousseau. Go along with him to the quai de Bercy and have a look at the poor devil who was fished from the river at dawn. From what Laboué here reports, he is another of these tattooed men, and a piece of skin is also missing from his back. This is getting to be queer. If you discover anything further, telephone to me and I will come down at once.'

I hastily gathered my implements and drove to the quai de Bercy with my colleague. The drowned man had been temporarily taken to a shed where empty wine-barrels were usually stored.

At sight of him Rousseau exclaimed in surprise.

'Look! — he was not drowned at all. The fellow has been strangled and then mutilated in the same manner as Brique.'

An examination of the body convinced me that Rousseau was not mistaken. A blue weal showed where a thin cord or, what was more likely, a length of wire had been tightly twisted round the neck. This time the man had been undressed to the waist. His body was covered with elaborate tattooing, and again a piece of skin had been ripped from his back just between the shoulders. Whilst we were waiting for M. Bertillon, one of the river police came in with some clothes which had been brought up by the drag near the spot where the body was found. A piece of steel rope was tied round the bundle and a coil of lead piping had been added to make it sink.

'That is probably the wire which strangled him,' Rousseau said. 'Let's see what is in the pockets.'

The parcel contained a shirt and a jacket of coarse fustian — obviously they were the clothes which had been taken from the victim. In one pocket we found a sheet of tracing-paper such as draughtsmen use, whilst in another was a limp and torn fragment of carbon paper. Both were, of course, soaked and discoloured. Rousseau gave a grunt of disgust.

'Nothing there to help us, I'm afraid, but we'll spread both pieces near the stove to dry. Perhaps Bertillon can find something.'

My chief was extremely interested in this strange repetition of a crime for which the motive was still a complete mystery. He stood for a long time closely studying the body, then with a shrug turned to me and said:

'Let me have those two sheets when they are dry, and a photograph of the man. Obviously he is another of the band. When I know who he is, I'll communicate with Kenifra. Have the body removed for a *post-mortem*.'

I carried the two precious scraps of paper to the laboratory and the afternoon was spent in applying every test and artifice that we could devise. The tracing-paper was the first to give any result. A repeated and gradual enlargement of the photographic plates each one intensified and copied from the previous one, slowly disclosed a series of faint lines. When these were again enlarged, they assumed the definite shape of a head, with several apparently meaningless letters beside it.

'That is intended to portray a lion's head,' my chief said, 'but a lion's head cut in stone. Look, it has a curious vague resemblance to the Sphinx. Those letters

are probably a secret language or, I should say, a conventional language, with a hidden meaning. By Jove! I believe this is a tracing of the tattooing which was on the drowned man's back! He must have been ignorant of its appearance himself and some one copied it for him by placing that thin sheet on his skin. The pencil marks were obliterated by the immersion in the river, but the point was very sharp and left a rough surface where it passed. Now let us see what is on the carbon paper. That was intended to reproduce the design more clearly from the tracing. It's a wonder the men who committed the crime did not destroy these clues.'

'They threw the clothes into the water and probably considered that to be sufficient,' I ventured.

M. Bertillon nodded assent.

Microphotographs were made of the broken, cracked surface of the carbon sheet. It was arduous work and required several days to complete. The numerous prints were then joined together until they looked like a huge puzzle, but across the centre, in faint, disjointed letters, ran the words,

'Voisin Biribi Hôtel Malher.'

'And that's another link in the chain,' said M. Bertillon when I showed him the result, 'and perhaps the name of the murderer. For the moment the copy of the tattooing is useless to us. If it means anything, we cannot solve it. Telephone to Calorbier at the records and ask him to look up Voisin or Voisin Biribi.'

An hour later, a messenger brought us several charts and photographs marked 'Voisin, known as Biribi.' It was a brutish, degenerate face which we saw, and again the most elaborate tattooing covered the body. Bertillon looked at the dates on the cards.

'What luck!' he cried excitedly. 'This fellow was

photographed when arrested for theft before he served in Africa. But he was also photographed again a year ago in Marseilles — when he was caught in a raid — and something has been added between his shoulders. "Malheurauxtraitres," written in one word, and that means "Death to traitors." They have been too clever. There was no need to tattoo the sentence as one word unless ——'

'It's the key to their transposed letters,' I interrupted excitedly.

M. Bertillon smiled at my eagerness.

'I feel sure that's what it is. So, if we find any more tattooed men, we'll be able to read their secret. Now let's see what the letters mean which we found on the tracing-paper.'

Although they were far from clear, I could dimly make out the following jumble to the left of the crude lion's head.

'Rmglaelttmreeilaeemtturaémlel ——'

For some minutes Bertillon's pencil was busy, then with a smile he threw the result of his labour across to me, and I read:

'Marcher plage rocher alligné avec —— Walk beach rock in line with ——'

'Read: Walk along beach until rock is in line with — lion's head,' Bertillon prompted. 'That is obviously what it means. You see where the man with the needle stopped every time he came to a fresh word, although they appear to run together — and the picture of the stone which looks like the sphinx completes the sentence with the pictograph "lion's head" or "sphinx's head."

'Well, we are not much nearer the solution yet, but we know a lot more than before. If only we can discover more of these tattooings. But already I begin to see

daylight, and I'll write to the commander at Kenifra at once. Something valuable is hidden on a beach; we can gather that, anyhow.'

'But why were these men murdered?' I questioned.

'Oh, the usual thing. There are probably a number of them. Each has a part of the secret on his back — and one or several want to cheat the others of their share. Probably it has been so arranged that individually they do not know what the signs mean. I cannot understand, however, why they have taken such trouble to efface the marks by cutting the skin away. Perhaps someone else is after the secret, too. It was not fear of the police that made them do it. At all events, it was a foolish trick. Had it not been for the missing pieces of skin we should never have guessed at the truth.'

Events now began to move quickly. Bertillon's discovery had been carefully kept secret, but a smart reporter seized on the coincidence of the tattooing and the missing skins to write a clever, witty article about the two crimes, and he had come very near the truth, although he merely suggested that the men had been members of a secret society. The 'Matin' also printed a semi-humorous article about 'Art in the Underworld,' and the public began to take an interest in the case. Inspector Louys and I had gone to the Hôtel Malher, dressed as ruffians, and taken rooms there. We spent our time quarrelling and drinking with the noisome scum, who, although they never worked, always appeared well provided with money. La Chouanne, the horrible impudent shrew who owned the place, was very suspicious of us at first; but when we returned from two feigned nocturnal expeditions with abundant funds, and I accidentally dropped a parcel on the stairs the second time, so that it disgorged a jemmy and some skeleton-

keys, she ran to pick them up and whispered with a leer:

'Don't be afraid, boys. I'll not inform the "flics" [police], but you must take a bag in future. Suppose that parcel had come undone in the street,' and she cackled wickedly at the sally.

From that moment we were free of the bandits' lair and able to come and go unchallenged. We had seen no sign of Voisin Biribi nor of any men bearing the unmistakable hall-mark of the African soldier; but there were two rooms at the rear of the hotel which were always shut, and we had observed La Chouanne carrying food on a tray to that part of the house. An invalid lady, she explained with a grin to Louys. One or two of the ruffians from the bar seemed always to be lounging aimlessly about near the doors, but if either Louys or I attempted to pass, they would crowd together with fierce scowls. We had tried several times to lure them away with an offer of drinks, which were never refused; but when we again passed the passage leading to that part of the house, growling voices warned us that others had taken their place. We soon discovered that we were not the only inmates of the hotel interested in solving the mystery of those closed rooms.

One night we crept down the stairs, carrying our burglars' tools in case we were seen. At the corner of the passage, which was dimly lit by a tiny lamp, we came unexpectedly on a curious group. The landlady was talking hurriedly in whispers to two stalwart fierce-looking Arabs. Even in the gloom we perceived that they were not Algerians, but true desert riders — Touaregs — although they were not dressed in the characteristic blue burnoos and veil. But there was no mistaking the haughty gestures, the curved eagle noses,

and flashing eyes. I caught the word Roumis (foreigners), and saw one of the Bedouins sweep his hand upwards as though thrusting with a knife. We flattened ourselves against the wall, with hearts thumping, hardly daring to breathe. Fortunately, a moment later all three shuffled silently away, without looking in our direction. I sensed instantly that these Arabs, of a type rarely if ever seen in Paris, were there with a purpose which boded ill for Voisin and his gang. La Chouanne was an Arab, and probably quite willing to betray men of an alien race. It came to me then that these tattooed men had probably committed some vile crime whilst stationed in the desert. The next morning I at once carried my news to Bertillon. I found him unusually excited, and with him were Dufresne and Rousseau. Bertillon listened to my report in silence, then he placed several photographs on the table before me. They were half-length pictures of men, naked to the waist, their skins covered with the most complex tattooing, and photographed so that only their backs were seen. I looked at the pictures in surprise, for they were obviously not police records.

'M. Laverdier came to us yesterday with the complaint that his studio and offices had been broken into. He is the former official photographer of the Foreign Legion at Sidi-bel-Abbes, and has been established in Paris only five years. The entry was made soon after he left, by means of skeleton keys. The strange thing is that nothing was stolen; but all his negatives of the last month have been smashed. I requested him to bring me as many prints of those negatives as he could find. There were not many, for all proofs are sent out a week after the sittings. These photographs had been printed, but not developed, and

thus escaped destruction. M. Laverdier was surprised and amused when a week ago four men came, on the same day, and demanded that he should make a picture of their backs. Shortly after the last man had left, a squat, evil-looking ruffian called and said he had been sent by his friends to request the photographer to have proofs ready the next day, and that they would pay an extra charge if necessary. He furthermore inquired if the photographs would be clear, and M. Laverdier showed him one of the negatives. The last man was, of course, Voisin. Laverdier at once recognised the photograph I showed him. Voisin had followed the men and thus learnt what had happened.'

'Then you have now a complete sentence?' I asked.

'Not complete. I believe that three fragments are missing. That means there were nine men altogether. Here is what I have:

Fifty kilometres — North West from Kenifra — walk along beach to rock in line with lion's head — and triangular rock in water — cave under shadow at noon — latitude... one metre from wall...

'Latitude and longitude and another six or seven words are still unknown to us. Voisin has the key word which we fortunately found. I have sent an urgent telegram to Kenifra. Your report fits in with my theory. Go back to the hotel at once. The presence of the Touaregs makes immediate action imperative. Watch closely, signal if an emergency arises, and be ready to admit us at three in the morning. I'll see to it that no one can get away. Men will be everywhere soon after dark. The records are searching for those four backs, but without faces or names that will be a long job. They may be dead already. Voisin is without pity, and deter-

mined to share the hidden loot with no one. But he is terrified of those Arabs, who have probably many allies amongst the Algerian population of that district. That is why he is making all these blunders ——'

'Did he kill those men, do you think, monsieur?' Rousseau asked.

Bertillon shrugged his shoulders.

'I don't know. I am inclined to think the Arabs did. That would explain the mutilation. They would naturally wish to prevent Voisin from obtaining the complete message. Then there is the use of an unknown poison; but, frankly, I don't know yet.'

I returned with all haste to the filthy hotel which always filled me with loathing; nor was it altogether pleasant to know that any of the men drinking and gambling there would shoot or stab me without the least hesitation. Yet I realised that the Sûreté could not give me more than one companion without alarming the inmates. Fortunately, Inspector Louys was a good man, strong and fearless, although small, as all French detectives are. The first rule of the Sûreté is that their men must be inconspicuous, and Dufresne had often grumbled at my size. I thought that the proprietress gave me a queer, intent look as I passed, which set my nerves tingling. Louys was sprawling on a dirty bench, feigning to be drunk and quarrelsome. He began to insult me when I sat down at a table, to the uproarious delight of all present.

'Here — I'll help you to bed,' I retorted. 'Come on; we've work to do to-night,' and I winked at the landlady. With her help we dragged Louys to his room. Covered by the noise of his apparently drunken monologue, I quickly related the result of my visit to headquarters. We agreed that I should stay downstairs as

late as possible — whilst he watched the rear part of the house where the mysterious rooms were.

'They will believe I'm sleeping off the effects of my carouse,' he whispered. 'It's lucky I can carry liquor, for they watched me closely to see that I really drank. They're a suspicious crowd, and constantly fear treachery even from their own brood.'

The Bedouins were nowhere to be seen, but to my surprise Voisin and two men I had not seen before came into the bar towards evening. Voisin looked older than he appeared on the police records. He was evidently on excellent terms with La Chouanne, and I wondered if he was aware of her intimacy with his enemies. It was a terrible evening I spent, for my senses warned me that every one of the creatures present was inwardly crouching, ready to erupt into violent, deadly action. Their eyes flickered uneasily from side to side; their ears, alert for every sound, twitched like a cat's, and their every word was a snarl. It was like sitting among some horrible primitive species akin to the gorilla. I was truly glad when towards midnight several of them rose to leave, giving me an excuse to go to my room. Behind me I heard Voisin and his friends stumbling upstairs.

My hand was already turning the door-handle when a wild scream, followed instantly by bestial roars and the thundering reports of several pistol shots, caused my already quivering nerves to contract convulsively. Louys sprang from the passage where he had lain in wait and tumbled down the crazy stairs, yelling to me to follow. For a second I was helpless from the unexpected shock, but the danger to my colleague roused me, and snatching a weapon from my pocket, I ran after him. The lamp in the passage had been extin-

guished by the shots, but the light of my electric torch disclosed a struggling, swaying mass of dark, panting shapes — cursing, clawing, and stabbing at each other. Louys had reached the street door and wrenched it open, blowing his whistle and barring the way with levelled pistol. Even as I arrived, the fighting group split up. I was hurled aside and fell painfully against an iron bed, whilst from below came shots and running feet. Five minutes later, police and detectives crowded into the room. Louys helped me to my feet and pointed to a dark, motionless form in a corner. It was one of the Arabs, and we saw that he was mortally wounded. We carried him to the bed and poured some brandy between his lips.

'There is one of Voisin's men lying outside,' Louys said. 'He has been stabbed to the heart. We caught no one but the woman. If only this fellow can live until Inspector Ben Hassouar gets here. He speaks many Arab dialects.'

'I'll try him in French and Spanish,' I said. 'Have you sent for a doctor?'

'Of course. He'll be here with Dufresne in a moment.'

Meanwhile, we bathed the wounded man's face and rubbed his muscular chest with brandy. Under our vigorous ministrations the Arab revived and opened tired eyes, but although we had at once applied wet pads to his wounds, it was clear that he could not live long. I spoke to him in French, but he closed his eyes again and whispered, 'No — French — Arab.' Fortunately one of the police had called a local doctor, who immediately injected stimulants. I looked at him questioningly.

'Perhaps twenty minutes,' he answered tersely; 'certainly not more.'

Five of the precious minutes had already elapsed when we heard the roar of a powerful car, and to our relief Inspector Ben Hassouar, a full-blooded Arab, although brought up in Paris, came in hurriedly, followed by Dufresne and Rousseau.

We sat and listened to the harsh, guttural purr of the Bedouin, as without prompting he poured out his tale, whilst our colleague wrote rapidly. I remember idly noting that his pencil travelled from right to left, when suddenly the dying man raised himself. 'Allah!' came in a hoarse croak. Then his head dropped — he was dead! Ben Hassouar touched his brow, lips, and heart in a humble obeisance.

'He was a prince in my country,' he said reverently. 'A Sheikh of the Atlas. His father was murdered by French soldiers, and his wonderful hereditary treasure stolen. He followed the men who did it for years, in order to avenge his father and to discover where the loot was hidden. Now he, too, has been murdered by the same men. Jackals he called them. But his servants will follow them wherever they go.'

'A fine type,' said Dufresne gently. 'Poor devil! Why did he not come to *us* at once?'

Ben Hassouar shook his head. 'Such men despise the police. It was natural that he should wish to kill with his own hand the man who murdered his father.'

'Did he say of what this treasure consisted?'

'Yes, French and Spanish gold. These desert men are all — h'm — well — raiders.'

'Quite so,' Dufresne rejoined dryly. 'But that is none of our business. You asked who killed the two men whose skin was ripped off?'

'It was the last question I put — and he died without answering it.'

'Very well, inspector, make a translation of your notes and let me have it. See that the body of the man on the stairs is carefully guarded. He is one of these tattooed bandits. Bertillon will want a photograph of his back at once. I shall communicate with all the ports and frontiers. That fellow Voisin will try to reach Kenifra, now that the old sheikh's son is dead also. Come along; we have much to do. You and Louys had better snatch a little sleep,' Dufresne said, turning to me. 'You look half dead, and no wonder. It's a bad defeat for us. If that Bedouin hadn't attacked Voisin and his men, we'd have captured them all. It happened just a couple of hours too soon.'

The next day my chief summoned me to his office. The anxiously awaited report from Kenifra had arrived.

'I will not read it all to you,' he said, pointing to a chair, 'but I know you'll want to hear how this business started. Years ago, ten men — among whom were Voisin, alias Biribi, Tomassini, Calagnac, Jules Brique, Tessier, and a former officer of the merchant service — succeeded in stealing guns and ammunition and escaped from the Seventh Disciplinary Battalion stationed at Beni Mourah in the desert. Arab Goumiers — camel-riders — were sent after them, led by three Spahis. They tracked them to the coast, and after several weeks came up with them. The men were in possession of a little ruined redoubt, but after some desultory shooting on both sides they surrendered and were taken back to Casablanca, where the court-martial sentenced them each to three years' hard labour. The naval man had disappeared, and the leader, Voisin, declared that he had been lost in a sandstorm. Soon after the nine men had been sent to the labour gangs, rumours reached the authorities of a night attack by

POLICE GUARDING APPROACHES TO HOTEL MALHER
AFTER THE FIGHT

French soldiers on a Touareg's oasis residence at Beni Ouadin.

'The story was very fantastic and so interwoven with tales of a stolen treasure that the commandant refused to investigate. The more so since none of the tribe would confirm the story. We know to-day that the tale was true. Here is the last link. The man killed last night is Tomassini, and on his back are the latitude and longitude. In his pocket was a photograph of three Arabs, and one of them is the Bedouin who was killed. That proves that these men knew they were watched and followed by the old sheikh's son. I have telegraphed a long account to the authorities at Kenifra, and have asked them to send sharp-shooters to watch the strip of shore fifty kilometres northwest of Kenifra. If we do not succeed in catching Voisin and his three companions, they will certainly try to reach the hidden gold. We shall trap them more easily in the desert than in Paris — there are not so many hiding-places. Now, what do you say to a trip to Casablanca — you and Louys? I am very curious, indeed, to know if this tattooed secret truly refers to hidden gold. If I could, I would come with you myself. The Prefect has consented to let me send you, although it is very irregular. As a matter of courtesy, you must, of course, ask permission to investigate the matter, of the commandant at Casablanca. Fortunately he is a friend of mine, and will not refuse. Arrange to start to-morrow via Cadiz. Perhaps in the mean time we shall have news of the men. It seems incredible that they should be able to get out of the country; but they are clever scoundrels, and France has so many frontiers. Report to me at six to-morrow; your train leaves at seven-thirty. I will have your tickets and papers ready.'

Neither Louys nor I could contain our delight, once we were out of the great man's office. We insisted on dragging the old Brigadier along to celebrate. He consented to drink our wine, but growled and grumbled in a continuous monologue — furious at being left behind.

'A nice thing to keep me in Paris whilst you youngsters get all the fun. I hope the Bedouins kidnap you both,' he said — but his grip when we parted for the night belied his words. He was the first to greet me at the quai des Orfévres the next day, and his eyes twinkled good-humouredly as he exclaimed:

'A wire from Spain, mes amis. Four men boarded a trading-vessel at Cadiz for Morocco. The Spanish police received our instructions too late to stop them. The commandant at Kenifra has sent a squad of Goumiers and légionnaires to the coast, so you'll probably arrive in time to see Biribi and his pals brought in.'

M. Bertillon confirmed the news and wished us bon voyage, adding a few words of kindly advice; so after a hasty meal we settled down for the long journey to Bordeaux, Cadiz, and thence to Morocco. Both Louys and I were like boys released from school. We forgot that men had been murdered, that Voisin and the others were cruel, deadly apaches. The glamour of hidden treasure, desert-riders, and Arab nomads had stirred our imagination. What a change it was from the everlasting finger-prints, knives, blood-stains, and all the usual retinue of crime. No wonder our chief had said wistfully that he would have liked to come also.

The commandant at Kenifra was very kind. Although it was unusual, he agreed to assist us in every way. A dozen légionnaires and six camel-riders commanded by a Spahi, were already patrolling the sand hills near the shore, he informed me. They had reported that no

rocks nor headlands answered to the description of the mysterious lion's head. Nor had any strangers been seen as yet. That day a relieving squad would ride out, and would act as escort for us if we wished. To this we eagerly agreed.

Progress across the yielding sand was slow, and a glowing twilight already made long crimson shadows of our company, which seemed to stretch out endlessly, when the sergeant, who had consulted the Arab guide several times with visible uneasiness as dusk drew near, abruptly gave the order to halt.

'I cannot understand this, messieurs,' he said, coming towards us. 'This is where my comrades were on duty. Some camped here, others in an old ruined outpost a mile inland. We should have been challenged by now.'

At that moment the guide uttered a guttural cry and held up his hand. Faintly vibrating sounds seemed to ripple over the desert, accompanied by a crackling like dry twigs snapping in a fire.

'Forward at the double — those are shots!' the sergeant yelled. 'Camel-riders, spread out in a half-circle in advance. There is a fierce fight going on near the shore.'

Admirably trained, every man dropped unnecessary equipment, retaining only gun, ammunition, and water-bottle, and, before the last word was ended, the Goumiers swept away with a swift, spidery motion, their tall, long-legged dromedaries looking like running giant ostriches in the gloom. We followed on our horses, whilst on each side padded the foreign légionnaires — silent and grim.

The cries and spattering volleys quickly grew louder. Then abruptly we heard a thin vibrant bugle call.

'Tonnerre! That's cease fire!' yelled the sergeant.

At the same moment a camel-rider dashed up, halted, and slid to the ground from the instantly kneeling beast.

'Touaregs,' he called shrilly. 'They caught the Frenchmen on the beach. Six of them, who had landed from a boat. The first warnings we had were screams and shots. Corporal Villiers and his men had to retreat to the redoubt. The Touaregs swept past firing; two hundred of them, I should think. We were hopelessly outnumbered for a fight in the open. Our men are on the beach now.'

Twenty minutes later, we came up with a group of men carrying torches. Sprawling in a heap like limp puppets were the last of the tattooed men, and above them on the sand-dunes lay several blue-clad Bedouins. An ambulance man was examining the prone figures.

'One of them is alive, sergeant,' he called. 'He wishes to speak to you.'

The dying man opened his eyes as we knelt beside him, and smiled faintly at my colleague. 'I know you,' he said in a tired voice. 'From Paris, eh? But you've come too late. Biribi is dead; only Tessier got away. The Arabs must have watched us land. They waited till we had the money and were going to carry it to the boat. Then they just killed us one by one and rode away with the gold.'

'Where is the lion's head?' Louys asked.

Again the man smiled, mockingly it seemed to us, whilst the flickering light from the torches twisted his haggard face into grotesque shapes.

'There *is* no lion's head — never was one. Years ago, when we saw the Goumiers were hunting for us, we knew escape was impossible and that we should be searched. So when it was dark we buried the gold we had stolen from the old sheikh, on the beach, and Biribi made

Dulac the sailor prick a part of the directions for finding it again on each man's back with gunpowder. "All or none," we swore. Only if all were together once more, after serving our sentences, was the gold to be dug up. But Dulac had the compass and could have found the place alone; we knew that well enough. So we killed him before the Goumiers came, and buried him in the fort. Serve him right! He meant to cheat us, and added that misleading bit about the lion's head and the rock in the sea. Biribi discovered the trick when he found some of us again and copied the marks on our backs. But there was enough that was right. I expect Dulac feared Biribi might have had time to examine the tattooing, or perhaps he was afraid of forgetting the exact spot himself. An African desert is not Paris. We all intended treachery, anyway. Biribi was free first, and of course tried to get here alone, but the sheikh's son had followed him to Algiers, and Biribi fled to Paris. The Bedouins gave us no rest. They trailed each man secretly when he was released. We discovered that too late. Voisin killed Brique and the other man, because they had found out the meaning of the letters on their backs; and he cut out the skin to prevent the Arabs from getting a hint of where the gold was hidden. Then La Chouanne told the Bedouins that Biribi was at the hotel, and they attacked him. That frightened the rest into joining forces. To think that after all these years we actually got here and found the gold again! Those Arabs are devils! What a mess!' — and closing his eyes wearily, the man passed away without a quiver.

The commandant shrugged his shoulders when we related what had happened.

'I shall do nothing,' he said. 'The Bedouins were justified in killing those apaches. For it's clear that the

old story of the murdered sheikh and the stolen treasure is true. I was not here at the time, but I've heard about it.'

Bertillon placed the queer photographs of the case before him, when I reported, and looked at them a long time, lost in thought.

'Well,' he said at last, 'it was a curious business. We failed to win out in many respects this time. Take these up to the records and tell Calorbier to classify them as dead.'

'But Tessier got away,' I ventured.

'Yes — for how long? Those desert men never forget. I'll keep copies of these and the dossier; something similar may happen again.'

EPISODE VI

THE MAN WHO BRED CATS

'STRANGE how certain crimes run in series,' said M. Bertillon to me musingly; 'almost as though a species of telepathy, or even some intangible evil influence outside our material world, acts simultaneously on degenerate or abnormal brains. I seem to visualise a swarm of crime germs floating in the atmosphere and swooping down from time to time to settle in receptive, fertile soil. I wonder if some day we shall discover that crime is a disease due to a microbe?'

'A form of madness, caused by unknown streptococci?' I queried, smiling.

'Exactly. It sounds fantastic — but who knows? Among the Malays we will, for instance, suppose that this microbe produces enough toxin to cause infected individuals to run amok and kill wholesale, whereas in the white it merely upsets his mental balance and drives him to cunning murders. After all, we know that certain drugs such as absinthe and hashish will bring on acute homicidal mania. Hence the word *assassin*, derived from *hashishin*. But this is foolish theorising. What caused me to speculate about crimes in series is that within the last month we have had two callous murders and three simulated accidents — all with the object of defrauding insurance companies or of anticipating the day when the criminals would normally have inherited money and property assigned to them in a will.

'That clever little M. Tierce, who acts as private investigator for the big insurance companies, was here this morning. It appears that a man named Sven

Larsen, who was well known as a salvage expert, has just died mysteriously. His life was insured for a large sum, half of which goes to his brother Jarg Larsen, the remainder to his wife Jeanne. Tierce believes that the man was poisoned; but I have spoken to the doctor who attended him, and he tells me that Sven Larsen died of tetanus, probably caused by a cut in his foot. I can understand that the insurance people don't want to pay, but if it was tetanus, then there has been no foul play. Maître Hoffmayer, the famous criminal lawyer, has telephoned, and will be here shortly. Madame Larsen, who is a Frenchwoman, was formerly his confidential secretary. After she married, the lawyer constantly visited the couple, and became the husband's intimate friend. I imagine he was just a wee bit in love with the girl. He tried to tell me some fantastic story of black magic and sorcery ——'

'Sorcery?' I ejaculated in surprise.

'Yes, so it seems,' M. Bertillon resumed. 'I have some information here about the brother Jarg Larsen,' and my chief consulted a document. 'Jarg is a mysterious, gloomy giant, silent and mystical, like so many Scandinavians. He was for many years a doctor on his brother's ship; Sven Larsen commanded a whaler in the South Seas. When he married and settled down in Bicêtre, Jarg went to live with the couple. He became a house surgeon under Dr. Deroular at the Lariboisière Hospital, but left suddenly because of some scandal. Since then it appears he has been carrying on research work in a small house he built on his brother's land. He is also — my report states — an authority on mediæval alchemy and Egyptian magic —— Ah!'

M. Bertillon ceased as a hurried knock sounded on the door. In reply to his curt 'Come in!' a tall, bearded

man in the flowing toga of the French barrister bustled in, a bulky leather brief-case under his arm.

'Good morning, Maître,' Bertillon exclaimed, rising with a smile. 'We were just discussing this farrago of tetanus and black magic. I presume you have called about that?'

'I have, M. Bertillon. It may have sounded a farrago, as you say, over the telephone, but I assure you that the death of my friend Larsen aroused a feeling of horror in me. I sense a foul crime. Whether I can persuade you to investigate or not is another matter.'

'Has Madame Larsen definitely accused anyone, then? Has she instructed you to inform the Sûreté?'

'No; I have advised her to wait. That is why I have called ——'

M. Bertillon waved his hand to a chair. 'Let's have the facts. Without prejudice — I think that is the phrase among lawyers, eh?'

But the barrister did not smile at my chief's jocular manner. He threw back his silken gown, settled himself comfortably, and drew a sheaf of papers from the leather case. 'First and foremost, then, there is this. Some years ago, the two brothers, Jarg and Sven, who were almost the same age, and inseparable, both insured their lives for a large sum of money — each making the amount payable to the other. As you no doubt know, they are Frenchmen by birth, although of Scandinavian parents. They chose a French company. Then, when Sven married my secretary, Jeanne Bigoud, they each increased the amount of the insurance — half to go to the surviving brother — the other half to Madame Larsen. The idea from the start was Jarg's.'

'I see — how did Sven come to marry your secretary?'

'I was counsel in several salvage cases, and they first became acquainted in my office.'

Bertillon nodded, and made several notes.

'They settled down in Bicêtre,' the lawyer resumed, 'and I became a constant visitor at their house. But I never liked Jarg. He is a gloomy, taciturn fellow, with the muscles of a giant and the temper of a fiend. He is obsessed with the belief that he is the descendant or reincarnation of an Egyptian priest from Bubastis. His bungalow is a veritable sorcerer's den. Stuffed crocodiles and owls everywhere. He keeps a dozen large Persian and Siamese cats, who are his only companions, and he dabbles in black magic, incantations, hypnotism, and the like. He lost his post at the hospital because he preferred magic formulæ to medical science. I have heard that several patients who died had circles, pentacles, and other cabalistic signs traced on their foreheads.'

'I shall inquire into the truth of that,' my chief interrupted. 'I take it you are merely repeating gossip?'

'More than that,' the lawyer returned indignantly. 'I questioned several nurses, who confirmed the tale. Well, since then, Jarg Larsen has gone from bad to worse. All his money goes to pay for mysterious experiments, and he constantly borrowed from his brother.'

'Do you know what his researches are?' Bertillon asked.

'No one knows; but they have something to do with the human soul and its transference into the bodies of animals. Madame Larsen thinks that he uses his cats ——'

'Have done, Maître,' Bertillon interrupted. 'You are a busy man, and so am I. Stick to facts.'

'It is a fact that he believes in sorcery, anyway,' the lawyer replied, flushing, 'for he has spoken about it to

me. It is the only thing he *will* speak about. Then a year ago Madame Larsen persuaded her cousin Bianca to live with her as companion, because Captain Larsen was often absent for months on salvage work.

'Bianca is a tall, extraordinarily dark, reserved girl, with such a far-away, dreamy expression in her eyes that it always made me feel uneasy. Her mother was a Russian, and Bianca is as queer as Jarg. Soon after her arrival, she began to help him in his laboratory. I fancy she is in love with him. It was from something she let slip that Madame Larsen first obtained an inkling of the true nature of Jarg's studies. It frightened her very much, for she is a devout Catholic, and so was her husband. They both began to watch Jarg and Bianca closely. Then it appears he suggested one day that Madame Larsen should let herself be hypnotised, thus bringing matters to a head. There was an awful scene between the brothers, during which Jarg said such terrible things that the next morning Sven came to consult me as to the advisability of getting an alienist to examine his brother, for he believed him to be insane. He also discussed a new will and the possible reassignment of his insurance policy in order to leave everything to his wife. I gave him the address of a notary who would do this. That was a week ago. Yesterday I received an urgent call from Madame Larsen. I drove to Bicêtre at once and found my friend unconscious. He died shortly after.'

'Did he make a fresh will and reassign the policy?' Bertillon asked sharply.

'No; he made an appointment with the notary, but did not keep it.'

'Do you think this — necromancer' — and my chief's lips curled sarcastically — 'knew of his intention?'

'Certainly — I know the insurance company wrote in reply to an inquiry over the 'phone, informing their client that the brother's signature would be needed for a reassignment. I imagine he mentioned it to Jarg.'

'And who benefits by the existing will?'

'I do not know. I believe the wife does.'

'So if, as you suggest, he murdered his brother, the only motive was the desire to prevent him from making the half share of the insurance payable to the wife?'

'There is something else,' the lawyer admitted, shifting uneasily. 'Madame Larsen confided to me that Jarg persecuted her with coarse attentions when her husband was away. It was this which decided her to take Bianca as a companion. After the scene, she warned Jarg that she would tell her husband about it.'

Bertillon gazed steadily at the barrister for several moments; then he asked slowly, 'And have you nothing to add? Is that all?'

Maître Hoffmayer rose at the words, his face pale.

'Yes; I have always loved little Jeanne, and, until Sven Larsen stepped in, had hoped to marry her. I still love her, and now that she is alone, I shall make it my business to protect her — as husband, if she'll have me. But there has never been ——'

'You need not continue, Maître. I know that, and your frankness disarms me. I can feel for you. But I can promise you nothing except that we will watch and investigate. If Larsen died of tetanus, then that ends the matter. Telephone to Madame Larsen and tell her I shall call this afternoon. I should like it managed so that the doctor who attended the husband will be there. Above all, she must keep the necromancer away somehow. I take it the body has not been moved yet.'

'No, nothing has been touched.'

When the lawyer had gone, M. Bertillon sat with bowed head, a brooding expression on his face, for long moments. At last he looked up, and there was horror in his eyes.

'I wonder,' he said. 'Tetanus? What a fearful thing to contemplate, and almost impossible to prove.' Suddenly his fist thumped the table. 'By Heaven, that lawyer may be right in believing that Larsen was murdered. His brother was assistant surgeon at the Lariboisière Hospital, where they have a number of tetanus cases.'

'Also he lives at Bicêtre,' I suggested hesitatingly.

M. Bertillon gazed at me in surprise. 'What of it?'

'Bicêtre is a former battle-field, and was a burial-ground during the revolution. The soil there is "tetaniferous" — I mean, impregnated ——' And I stopped short, alarmed at the look on my chief's face. It was but a gleam; in an instant a mask of indifference had wiped out the tense expression. He smiled slowly.

'That is a good shot you made. I'd forgotten. Since your interest is so keenly aroused, you had better come with me this afternoon. Send Rousseau to me now.'

A telephone message summoned me from my microscopes shortly after lunch. I found M. Bertillon waiting at the door of the Sûreté headquarters with a closed car, and Rousseau already installed beside the driver. We were soon at Bicêtre, an outflung arm of suburban Paris. A number of large oak trees formed a leafy screen before the house of the Larsens, which stood in extensive grounds surrounded by a hedge of hawthorn interlaced with vines. Some distance behind the main building stood a long squat bungalow painted red, the dwelling and laboratory the lawyer had mentioned, in which Jarg

Larsen lived with his cats and experimented in ancient sorceries.

Evidently Madame Larsen had been anxiously watching for our arrival, for as we came up the path she stepped from the house and stood for a moment irresolute, convulsively clasping and unclasping her hands, a terribly tragic and lonely figure. She was already dressed in black, and her golden hair drooped in heavy coils from under a wisp of black veil. Her eyes were swollen with weeping, and the nerves of her face twitched as I have seen them do in the faces of men listening to sentence of death. Abruptly at the sound of a door slamming somewhere in the house, she cringed and raised one arm as though expecting a blow. M. Bertillon stepped quickly forward and seized her hands, murmuring low words of consolation and sympathy.

'We have come, madame,' he said, 'at the request of your good friend Maître Hoffmayer, and will do all in our power to help you. Is there no one here with you?'

'Yes, yes, there is a religieuse from the Convent of the Sacred Heart; in the bedroom where my poor husband is lying,' and she gulped miserably, tears again starting from her eyes. 'There is also the doctor who is waiting for you.'

'Then perhaps you will let us go to him first. Afterwards, if you are strong enough, I should like to put some questions to you. Where is your cousin, Mademoiselle Bianca, by the way?'

'In her room. The lawyer said you wished to see me alone.'

'Quite right. And your brother-in-law?'

'He is up there in his bungalow. I told him that some relations of mine were coming. I'll wait here for you,

if I may. I can watch and warn you should he come out. He — he is very violent.'

'Remain here with madame,' Bertillon said briskly to Rousseau, 'and call if you see the fellow.'

The bedroom where the body was lying was on the second floor, and overlooked the front of the park. It was a large room with one big French window.

'Be careful where you step,' my chief said to me, 'although, unfortunately, footprints or finger-prints are of no use to us here. All the usual indications must fail, since there has been no violence, and the fellow Jarg is a member of the household.'

The doctor, who had seen us enter, quickly gave M. Bertillon an outline of the case.

'I was called at dawn yesterday,' he related. 'My patient was already then in a state of coma. The jaws were locked in the characteristic rictus of tetanus — the body bent like a bow and resting only on the heels and head. I did all I could, but it was hopeless from the first. I have found nothing to lead me to believe that poison or anything else was used. There is a deep cut in the left foot near the little toe. That is how the bacillus entered the nervous system.'

M. Bertillon walked to the body and drew down the sheet. Then he examined the foot.

'Was the cut bandaged, doctor? I see it is very deep.'

'No, it was as you see it.'

'What? No bandage? Then it must have bled freely. Give me the dead man's shoes and socks,' he continued, turning to me. Bertillon scrutinised the left sock and the shoe for a long time, handing them back to me without a word. Then he walked to the dressing-table and picked up a razor-case. 'Take this,' he said, 'but

be careful how you handle it. There should be some indications there.'

He continued to examine the room carefully, but his eyes came back again and again to the body. At last, with a shrug of the shoulders, he exclaimed, 'According to you, doctor, how long had the disease been active?'

'Probably sixty hours. That is the usual duration, although in some cases it kills sooner.'

'And how old should you say that cut was? You see, it is quite clean and open, nor is there any sign of its having begun to heal.' The doctor looked startled, and examined the cut again. His face was grave as he looked up.

'You are right — it might have been inflicted only a few hours ago. But then that's impossible. The man was already dead. What do you imagine ——?'

'I imagine nothing, doctor. It is for you to answer my question. Still, it's not important. Obviously, as you say, the man died of tetanus.'

I looked up, surprised at the indifferent manner in which M. Bertillon spoke, and saw a curious, intent look on his face. At the same instant a door closed quietly somewhere not far away. My chief relaxed his tense pose and smiled grimly. Then he beckoned to me, and together we descended to where Madame Larsen was still waiting.

'Where is your cousin's room?' he whispered excitedly. 'On the same floor — at the back? Thank you,' and without another word he ran quickly across the grounds to the hedge and crept along until he was hidden by the house. Ten minutes passed before he reappeared, breathing quickly.

'Does your cousin often light her lamp in the daytime?' was his strange question, as he approached.

'No, why should she?' Madame Larsen replied.

'But she has done so now. Can it be seen from the bungalow — as a signal, for instance?'

The woman shivered, but instead of answering looked searchingly into my chief's eyes. A spot of angry red showed on her cheeks, and she stepped forward eagerly, her trembling hand resting for an instant on Bertillon's arm.

'You have discovered something, then?'

'No, madame, nothing — as yet. Now tell me. Was your husband in the habit of cutting his corns with a razor?'

'I cannot tell you, sir. It must be so, since the doctor says that he cut his foot deeply.'

'He was not by chance left-handed?'

'Oh, no! but he could use both hands well. He mentioned it often, and said it was a useful gift for a sailor. His brother is the same.'

'Did you throw away a bandage he had tied around the wound?'

The woman shook her head slowly.

'Thank you. Just one other question: Where is the will your husband made?'

'I have it in my bureau. My husband left everything to me, but there are some clauses which concern Jarg. He is taking it to the notary.'

'Thank you. Now I should like to speak to Mademoiselle Bianca, and afterwards I will interview your brother-in-law.'

When the woman had entered the house, Bertillon turned to me and said rapidly: 'Return to the Sûreté at once. I want you to examine those razors — quickly. The girl must not see you. You, Rousseau, will spend a few hours among the neighbours, and report to-morrow morning.'

We hurried away at once, Rousseau to the nearest inn, whilst I hailed a taxi and drove back to the quai des Orfévres. The case which I had taken contained two hollow-ground ordinary razors. Both handles showed finger-prints, but I perceived with a thrill that they were not the same. The edge of one razor was slightly blood-stained, and under the microscope I saw that the blood was fresh.

The next morning Bertillon came to my office and examined my work. After comparing the finger-prints with some which he had brought on a card, and which I guessed were those of the dead man, he said grimly:

'Those on the blood-stained razor are not the dead man's, and there is the mark of a thumb and index finger on the blade, eh? Yes, I thought so. I imagine Jarg left those when he opened the razor. A terrible man — he threatened to kick me out until I showed him how unwise that would be, since I had only come to ask a few questions. A queer place, that bungalow, although I saw little of it. He stood in the doorway and talked to me. I also spoke to Bianca. That girl is only apparently cold and reserved. She's white-hot inside, and, I begin to believe, as mad as the brother.'

'What did that cut tell you, monsieur?' I asked breathlessly.

'You saw what I saw — only a left-handed man could cut himself in that way. I thought I had something there, until Madame Larsen spoiled it by saying that both brothers are ambidextrous. So nothing remains except that the cut did not cause tetanus and was probably made when the man was unconscious or dead. The sock and shoe should have been blood-stained if he walked about with a bandage; the wound had not even started to heal. I believe it was made after death by

Jarg, and those finger-prints on the razor confirm that theory. That means the bacillus entered somewhere else and Jarg cut his brother's foot so that the doctor should not seek elsewhere. But it doesn't help us. We must obtain conclusive evidence before we can act. From what Rousseau reported, this Jarg is a deep one, and an ardent admirer of the fair sex. He has had several quarrels over women in the neighbourhood. Thank Heaven for that! A woman will trip him up as usual. Now I want you to go to Bicêtre this afternoon, to call on Madame Larsen as a friend of her late husband. It's all arranged. Beware of listeners. I believe that girl Bianca is Jarg's spy, and that she signalled "all's well" by lighting her lamp yesterday. I caught a glimpse of binoculars on the fellow's table as he opened the door. They have probably a Morse code. Don't stay too long, but find out if the girl is in constant touch with Jarg. Here is a key of the gate; Rousseau will join you at dusk. If by good luck the man should go out, let him be followed; two plain-clothes men are on duty not far away. You must then try to enter his bungalow and search it. I am not telling you to break in; that would be illegal. But perhaps Rousseau may find the door open,' and Bertillon smiled suddenly; so did I. I knew the old Brigadier always carried instruments which opened most doors.

'Whatever you do,' Bertillon cautioned me, 'don't be caught in there. It would spoil every chance of getting evidence.'

My call on Madame Larsen made it very evident that Bianca was keenly on the watch, for when I suddenly opened the door, I heard a patter of footsteps on the stairs and caught a glimpse of a tall, dark girl disappearing into a room on the first landing. As I left, I per-

ceived two men apparently busy outside the gate with tape and surveyor's stick. They were the detectives from headquarters.

'Tell Rousseau I shall wait at the wine-shop opposite the tram stop,' I said in passing, 'and let me know the moment Larsen goes out.'

Just at sunset the Brigadier joined me and we settled down near the door. One of the detectives had been instructed to follow Larsen if he went out, whilst the other was to signal to us outside the inn by lighting a cigarette. He would then take our place, and his colleague would telephone to warn him the moment Larsen turned back. It was only a short distance from the inn to the Larsen house, and we should hear a whistle from the road distinctly.

It was almost ten when at last we saw a match flare up under the shelter, just as an electric tram came to a halt. Rousseau at once shambled out while I paid the bill. We gained the grounds without trouble.

'He's taken a tram to Paris,' the Brigadier informed me. 'Dressed as for an evening out. I hope he doesn't suddenly change his mind.'

Inside the grounds it was pitch-dark, and we had to feel our way carefully, for it would have been dangerous to use our lamps. At last the bungalow loomed up before us, and Rousseau at once set to work on the door, whilst I gave him occasional gleams of light near the lock to guide him. It seemed a long time to me before a sharp click and a grunt of satisfaction from my friend told me that he had succeeded in opening the door. We carefully wiped our feet on a cloth brought for that purpose, and entered.

'I think we can risk a light,' Rousseau whispered. 'There are heavy shutters outside and thick blinds and

curtains before the windows. I'll throw my overcoat along the bottom of the door. Go and see whether the light shows.'

I did so, but beyond a faint grey haze which did not carry far, nothing could be seen.

It was indeed a strange place we were in. Maître Hoffmayer had not exaggerated when he called Larsen a sorcerer and alchemist. The whole front of the bungalow was one long room, evidently his study and laboratory. In a weird array around the walls stood stuffed owls, mummified cats, and reptiles. A great Nile crocodile, with gaping jaws, swung from the rafters, whilst the centre of the floor was occupied by a huge sphere of brass, engraved with the signs of the Zodiac, and encircled by movable metal rings. Under the windows from door to wall ran a bench littered with crucibles, retorts, and Bunsen burners; and against the opposite wall I perceived a modern electric furnace. The books which lay scattered about were as strange as the rest. Medical treatises and works on chemistry, jumbled pell-mell with ancient tomes of occultism and magic, filled many shelves. Beside the brass astrologer's globe stood a table bearing a large, beautifully translucent crystal on a velvet cloth, and before it lay a roll of papyrus covered with hieroglyphics. It was a queer mixture of modern science and mediæval superstition. I examined some of the books. They were German or Swedish. One was Starnberg's transmutation of base metals; another dealt with reincarnation and the teachings of Buddha. There was nothing here to help us in our investigation, and I was about to say so when my heart contracted. Rousseau had turned the handle of a door leading to a back room, but as it opened, he sprang back with a yell of terror. From the dark gap came a scratching and

pattering of feet and I saw a cluster of gleaming, phosphorescent eyes. I stood frozen with horror for a second, then I remembered the cats. Bertillon had evidently not told Rousseau about them. He laughed with relief when I explained.

'Cats!' he exclaimed. 'For a moment I thought they were devils.'

There were a dozen or so large sleek cats shut in behind a wire screen, which divided the room in half. Beautiful animals: tabbies, blue Persians, and several tawny specimens from Siam. They purred with delight at our appearance. I saw there was a wire door leading into the cage, which I opened. One great fellow came rubbing himself contentedly against my legs and I picked him up.

'Whatever the man's faults,' I remarked to my companion, 'he cares for his pets. Look at their splendid condition. He must spend his time brushing and combing them.'

'Yes,' Rousseau agreed, 'but look at the size of their claws,' for the animal I held was pushing his velvety paws against me, opening and retracting them contentedly.

'Just a minute, Brigadier,' I cried, 'hold him, will you? I want to look at these claws. Strange' — I added — 'smell them — they have been steeped in carbolic.'

'Carbolic — by Jove, so they have!' Rousseau agreed, sniffing at the paws. 'Try some of the others.'

We picked them up one by one, but only three — two tabbies and a black-and-white — smelled of disinfectant.

'Now, I wonder,' Rousseau muttered. 'Some of his experiments, I expect. Better put them back, we may have to run for it at any time.'

The upper half of the cage was taken up by a sleeping-

loft for the animals, which they gained by climbing little ladders. This was a vast box with a lid at the top, and was lined with straw.

The remainder of the room was a sort of bedroom with a low comfortable divan across one end. We returned to the laboratory and gazed around in despair. It would take days to search it systematically.

'We had better go now,' Rousseau suggested. I was about to assent when a beautiful microscope near the lamp attracted my attention.

'Wait a minute,' I called, settling myself and adjusting the eyepiece. 'There is a slide in it — let's see what he works at.' I set the mirrors and focussed quickly. For a moment my sight was blurred, then a tingling shock ran through me.

'Good God,' I yelled, nearly upsetting the instrument as I started up. 'Do you know what is in that slide? Tetanus bacilli!'

Rousseau stared incredulously, but before he could reply a fumbling sound at the door set our hearts pounding. A key grated in the lock, and Rousseau snatched up his coat, switched off the lamp, and dragged me into the back room, shutting the door.

'Into the cats' loft quick!' he whispered, pulling open the wire door. 'It's our only chance. The pussies won't hurt us, but mind you don't tread on them.'

As noiselessly as possible we lifted the lid and climbed in, stretching out on the straw. At once soft warm furry bodies came to investigate this strange intrusion, and a continuous purring vibrated in our ears. Someone had entered the laboratory, for a ray of light shot along the floor, and we heard gliding steps pacing to and fro, but they did not sound like a man's. Abruptly a whistle shrilled from the park, loud and insistent. It was the

signal that Larsen was returning. Five minutes later came a heavy tread and a slam which shook the building. A deep, growling voice said:

'What the devil are you nosing around for, Bianca? Haven't I told you not to come here unless you see the light?'

'I thought I did see a light,' a woman's soft and refined voice replied; 'that is why I came. But you haven't kissed me, Jarg, nor told me where you've been.'

'Stop that nonsense,' Larsen exclaimed angrily. 'I need you for other things. There is danger — I feel it round me ever since that dog of a lawyer called in the police. Sit down, Bianca, I want to read the future.'

'Not to-night, Jarg, not to-night. I am not in the mood,' Bianca pleaded.

'Sit down, I tell you! So — now you are going to sleep — you are feeling sleepy — you are sleeping — ah!'

A drowsy voice said, 'I am so cold, Jarg. I am out in a fog.'

'Look nearer — at the house. What do you see?'

'Jeanne is crying beside her husband's body. Now she rises and takes a paper from the bureau.'

'Has she keys in her hands?'

'Yes — she has put the paper back in a drawer. The keys she puts in the pocket of her dressing-gown. She is writing now ——'

'Look closer, I will you to look ——' and Larsen added some words in a strange tongue which I did not recognise.

'I cannot see clearly,' the woman's voice wailed, 'you are hurting me — it is about the paper she has just looked at — let me wake.'

We heard the crash of an overturned chair and then

the sound of weeping. The man apparently cared little for this and his heavy tread went pacing up and down for a long time.

'Go up to the house,' Larsen suddenly ordered, 'and watch if any letters are taken to be posted by the servant. You must get them somehow or we shall not be able to go away together. You still want that, don't you, Bianca?'

'More than my life, but I don't trust you any longer. You are yet fond of Jeanne.' And there was sudden passion and anger in the woman's tone, which reminded me of Bertillon's words, 'she is white-hot inside.'

'Nonsense,' Larsen countered; 'that was before I saw you. There, give me a kiss now and do what I say.'

We had been so interested in the strange scene between these two that we had quite forgotten our own predicament, which was serious enough. We were quite in the wrong, housebreakers, in fact, and the fellow was a fierce, violent brute. My heart jumped as the door leading to the bedroom swung open and Larsen came in. But it was evident he suspected nothing. He merely glanced round, made a few friendly noises to his pets and returned to his laboratory, leaving the door ajar. We heard him settle down to some mysterious work. A seething and crackling from the electric furnace and the smell of ozone penetrated to our hiding-place. For several hours the fellow was absorbed by some occult research which did not go to his liking, for he kept up a constant muttering and growling in a deep, rumbling voice. Our limbs were cramped and aching, but we dared not move for fear of the noise the straw under us would make. At last, when the pain in my legs was becoming intolerable, he suddenly threw down a heavy volume with a crash and came back to the cage. To our

horror he opened the door and called softly, 'Flock, Jim, Goldie.' The animals at once scrambled from the loft and we saw, through the holes by which they had access to it, that he had picked up the same three which I had seen in Mrs. Larsen's room that afternoon. A minute later the lamp was extinguished and the outer door slammed.

'Quick, now!' Rousseau whispered. 'He's gone; this is our chance. Rub your legs and try to follow.'

Staggering painfully, we gained the grounds. The faint grey light of dawn already made trees and bushes dimly visible. Larsen was nowhere to be seen, but a soft whistle from the hedge warned us that the detectives, anxious for our safety, had watched and waited through the night. With their help we forced our way through a tangled opening. One of the men at once ran to obtain a car from the local gendarme station, and an hour later we were refreshing ourselves in the service room at headquarters.

M. Bertillon listened gravely to my report, but he was evidently very disappointed.

'There is nothing, absolutely nothing,' he said when I had concluded, 'which will justify an arrest. I feel sure now that a crime has been committed, but what evidence have we? The tetanus slide in the microscope? Startling, yes — but he will say that as a doctor he was studying it because of his brother's death. They were only dead bacilli, anyhow, since, as you know, they die if exposed to the air. The carbolic on the cats' claws is suggestive, but only to us. You say they were the same cats which Madame Larsen was fondling when you called. Yes. I see what you are driving at, but it's no good. We must wait, watch, and work slowly. I advised Madame Larsen to be as friendly as possible with her

brother-in-law and I purposely refrained from telling her that I suspected the cousin Bianca. After all, it may be only an amorous intrigue. We must try to weave the various threads together. I am going to consult Maître Hoffmayer and M. Charpie, the *juge d'instruction*. I'll also get in touch with the insurance company and the notary. Now go and get some sleep. I'll send for you if there are any developments.'

Later in the day I saw my chief again. The insurance company had decided to abandon their attitude that a crime had been committed and were willing to pay. The only information of any value was that Madame Larsen had telephoned to the notary and informed him that she wished to make a will and would call the next day to consult him. She had spoken of a letter she sent, but this letter the notary had not received. Another day passed whilst the Sûreté continued their inquiries. Then on the following morning, just as I was settling down to ordinary routine work, a messenger summoned me hurriedly to Bertillon's office. The moment I entered, I saw that something terrible had happened. Rousseau and Dufresne were standing talking in a corner whilst my chief was bending over Maître Hoffmayer who sat, his head sunk on his hands, sobbing in utter abandon.

'Madame Larsen died this morning,' Bertillon said sharply, looking up as I came in. 'A doctor and a specialist attended her, and they are waiting for us. Tetanus again! Yes ——' as I started at the unexpected news. 'Two of our men are guarding the house. We are going there at once. Bring all that is needed.'

Without waiting for anything further, I ran to collect a complete outfit. Plaster, gelatine, lenses, lamps, and a special camera. A powerful car drove us to Bicêtre. The funeral of Sven Larsen had taken place on the day

before and the main entrance, according to French custom, was still draped in black. In the front room where I had visited the unfortunate wife, we saw several cats asleep on a couch.

The body was in a bedroom which adjoined the one where Sven Larsen had died. Both the doctors were waiting and Bertillon made copious notes of their report. One was a local practitioner and had been summoned just after dawn by Bianca, who implored him to come at once because her cousin was dying. She had insisted on the presence of a specialist and he had telephoned at once to a colleague. The patient was unconscious when they arrived, and was obviously suffering from all the symptoms of tetanus. She revived for a few minutes under their ministrations, and they had made a note of some words she tried to say through clenched teeth. These had sounded like 'Jarg, Jarg — cats — will.' Nothing could be done and Madame Larsen died about ten o'clock. Maître Hoffmayer had called towards the end and had begged them not to stir from the room until his friend, M. Bertillon, came. They promised this and he had then rushed away to fetch us.

The moment the doctors had withdrawn, M. Bertillon dropped his mask of indifference. His eyes glittered, a flush came to his cheeks, and his speech, ever sharp and concise, became almost clipped.

'You, Rousseau!' he snapped. 'Stand outside that door and allow no one to pass, but stand where you are not seen and report if anyone tries to enter.' Then when Rousseau turned to obey, he beckoned to me. 'Your lamps and lenses. Please sit down for a moment, M. Dufresne, I wish to get the atmosphere of this room.'

We obediently withdrew to a corner. Bertillon remained in the centre, his eyes roving from spot to spot.

'They are clever scoundrels,' he muttered. 'Well, we shall see if our brains cannot beat them.'

It was wonderful to watch the great criminologist at work. I perceived that he was now convinced that husband and wife had been murdered. Indeed, this second mysterious death so soon after the first made it seem likely, but I failed to follow his rapid deductions. An hour passed whilst I stood and watched him scrutinising, measuring, and scribbling in his notebook; or, obedient to his orders, transferred finger-prints, and photographed scratches and stains. At last, after another long and careful study of the body, he straightened up with a sigh and called us to him.

'Murder,' he said in a low voice, glancing anxiously at the door, 'a callous and clever murder. I am far from clear about the method yet. But this is what I know. That poor woman fought for her freedom when she realised that death was near. There were two people with her, for we have three different types of finger-prints; her own and those of the criminals. She was held a prisoner until the disease had rendered her helpless. Her wrists are terribly bruised and scratched and her nightgown is torn. A wisp of the lace is on the curtain hook and her moist hands have smeared the window-pane. That was when she tried to gain the balcony. She was dragged away, but her nails have scratched the paint around and on the window fastening. Some of it is still under her nails. Then she attempted to unlock the door and the key was torn from her hand. There is a deep furrow near the keyhole and the end of the key has a shaving of paint adhering to it. After that she must have collapsed and was put to bed again. You can see where her feet have pulled the lower sheet away when they pushed her in. But I imagine she recovered

for a short time. Probably they locked the door and left her alone when they sent for the doctors. With superhuman courage she dragged herself to that writing-table and wrote a message. There is a black pencil-stain on the second finger of the right hand and the broken point of a pencil was on the floor. We have not a moment to lose. Send your motor-cyclist to the *juge d'instruction* and demand a search-warrant. Meanwhile, call gendarmes. We must surprise Larsen in his bungalow before he can destroy valuable evidence. Perhaps the message she wrote is still to be found. It was in that drawer, for on the edge are the dead woman's finger-prints and those of a man. We have not sufficient evidence for an arrest, but we are justified in searching. Quickly, now!'

Dufresne at once ran to fetch the gendarmes who were outside the gate. As we came out, Rousseau stepped from a little recess and saluted.

'The girl sneaked downstairs, but ran up again when she saw me.'

'Then go to her room and see she touches nothing; order her to sit quietly in a chair,' Bertillon said sharply.

When we reached the grounds, M. Dufresne was already waiting outside the bungalow with the uniformed police. Bertillon at once pushed the door open without ceremony and entered. A tall broad-shouldered man with long fair hair and curly beard started up at our unexpected irruption. It was my first view of Larsen. He had the brow of a philosopher and the eyes of a madman. His face contracted with rage and his fists clenched ominously, but the presence of the gendarmes caused him to restrain his temper.

'Sit down,' Dufresne said sharply, 'and place your hands on the table. We are going to search this place.

If you move from there, I'll have you placed under arrest.'

'Search away,' Larsen snarled; 'you're welcome to all you can find. But I warn you. This is an outrage and I'll make you regret it.'

Dufresne shrugged his shoulders and stepped to the table. 'I'll watch him while you search,' he said quietly.

Unfortunately, this second investigation seemed fated to be as fruitless as the first, which Rousseau and I had carried out. We were about to go when Bertillon, who had been observing the man's eyes narrowly, walked to a small cupboard and pulled open the door. With a hoarse growl Larsen started up, but sank down again as the police sprang forward.

Bertillon came back and held out a double sheet of foolscap with several seals on it.

'Is this the will your brother made?' he asked Larsen.

'Yes, and it is none of your business. That is a private paper. I demand its instant return.'

'It shall be returned to you, but I wish to examine it first' — our motor-cyclist came stumbling in at that opportune moment — 'and here is our search-warrant, you see, M. Larsen. So you will be wise not to make trouble. If you are innocent of any plot against your brother and his wife, you have nothing to fear.'

'You are mad, you fool,' Larsen replied, but I saw that his brow was damp with perspiration and his face deathly pale.

Dufresne posted two men in the grounds with orders to prevent either Larsen or Bianca from leaving. A search of the girl's room revealed nothing unusual, except a circular concave mirror, which might have been only a toilet requisite, but which Bertillon believed to have been used for signalling from the window. I under-

stood then why he had pulled out the main electrical switch the moment we had entered the house. He had thus prevented Bianca from warning Larsen of our visit.

Once in the car, which drove us immediately to the quai des Orfévres, Bertillon lay back and laughed silently. I dare say I looked astonished, for he said,

'Oh, the clever, clever woman! Although dead, I think she has avenged her husband and herself. She knew that any written message proclaiming the truth would inevitably be found and destroyed by those beasts. But she was inspired, and she wrote it on something they could not destroy. Don't you see their dilemma? They commit murder, double murder, and risk the guillotine in order to obtain the insurance money, and Sven Larsen's wealth. Sven had, unfortunately, made a foolish will by which his brother became the sole heir if the wife died, but he added a clause later giving his wife the right to dispose of everything by a fresh will. Thus they were driven to kill her before she could do so. Only — *to inherit, they must produce the old one. And it is on the margin of the will that she wrote her denunciation.* Splendid! Splendid! A stroke of genius! Either they destroy it and lose all, or they must risk producing it.'

'But,' I objected, 'I saw no pencilling.'

'There isn't any. Larsen effaced it with rubber and powdered pumice-stone, but we can bring it out again, as you well know.'

'Why the pumice-stone?'

'Because — I said the woman was inspired — she pressed down as hard as she could with the pencil so as to mark the paper. I guessed that when I found the stain on her finger, and that sharp broken point on the carpet. So where she had written, Larsen made the

margin smooth with pumice-stone. He is very ingenious, but he knows nothing of scientific investigation.'

'You will use iodine vapour?' I queried.

'Yes, iodine vapour and photography. Oh — we've got him now.'

It was late in the afternoon before my negatives were sufficiently clear to be read — and a dreadful, pathetic message it was. Several words were missing, but there was enough without them.

Dying like my husband [it ran, hacked and broken, along the edge]. It is the cats' claws that carry the disease — my poor sweet cats — Jarg — Jarg Larsen is the fiend who has killed us both. I accuse him and Bianca of murder. I am a prisoner. Thank God, he left the will behind, I know he dare not destroy it. He laughed and jeered — but God ——

Then there came a deep scratch where the pencil had broken. Bertillon looked at me, his face grey with horror.

'If only I had known of that foolish will, I could have warned her in time. Get the *juge d'instruction*. I must have a warrant for their arrest at once. Tell Dufresne to let me have a dozen men and two fast cars. Hurry! For once I'll be present when the police get their man.'

House and grounds were in darkness when we arrived and the gate was locked. Rousseau soon had it open, but a cry from Dufresne stopped us as we were about to rush to the bungalow.

'The two officers,' he cried; 'where are they?'

'Go carefully,' Rousseau growled; 'perhaps he has killed them.'

To our dismay the door of the bungalow stood wide open. Across the threshold lay one of our men, his

head smashed by a blow from behind; the other was nowhere to be seen. The large laboratory looked as though a cyclone had wrecked it. Broken bottles and retorts were piled in heaps — and books lay scattered everywhere. A loud wailing and scratching from the back room caused us to run there. Rousseau was first and stumbled over a body stretched before the cats' cage. It was Bianca, and she was dead. A cloth had been tied tightly over the nose and mouth and from it came a smell of bitter almonds.

'Prussic acid,' Bertillon exclaimed; 'better put on gloves and turn your head away when you untie it.'

In the girl's hand we found a curious instrument. It had a sinuous carved ivory handle with a steel blade shaped like a claw at the end; and the point was blood-stained.

Bertillon looked at this thoughtfully.

'Strange,' he muttered. 'What did she hope to do with that?' We carried the girl to a couch and placed our men in hiding all over the grounds in case Larsen returned. Telephone and telegraph circulated his description immediately and the frontiers and port authorities were warned. The man's exceptional size would make disguise very difficult. None of us left headquarters that night, and just after dawn a telephone call came from Feigniés, the Belgian frontier. It was from the second detective. He had been stunned by a blow from behind, but was able to obtain a car and follow Larsen. He had seen the fellow board a train at a wayside station, but arrived too late to stop him. He had thereupon telegraphed to the frontier and followed in the car. Larsen was now in a cell.

He was brought to Paris the next afternoon and taken to the dépôt. But he never stood his trial. In the

morning an urgent message came from the infirmary that Larsen was dying. *During the night he had developed tetanus.* We were in time to take down a broken statement before his jaws set rigidly. He died the same day.

Bertillon came to my office after the visit at the infirmary and examined the queer instrument we had found in Bianca's hand.

'Poetic justice,' he said with a queer smile. 'I have been reading Larsen's diary. Between commonplace entries he had written with invisible ink. I got no reaction until I tried water with sugar. He had used a solution of beta-naphthol, an excellent trick. An evil creature, that Larsen! He knew that by using tetanus bacilli it would be almost impossible to prove that the brother and his wife were murdered. He was a doctor, you see. He had discovered that the bacillus was present in quantities near the bungalow and he rubbed the cat's claws in the soil. Both his brother and the wife were very fond of the animals, and I imagine he would pull them away brutally whilst they were caressing them, causing the poor things to cling desperately with their claws and thus produce the fatal scratches. Afterwards he cleaned the claws with carbolic. He must have intended to use that ivory tool first. It is Chinese. No doubt the steel claw at the end gave him the idea of making his cats the innocent conveyers of the germs instead. Bianca was his accomplice in everything. Poor girl, she was utterly in his power. The man was mad, of course; his diary is full of the most weird nonsense. Sorcery, devil worship, and the like. You heard him confess that she attacked him when he was preparing for flight, because he refused to take her along. He didn't know when he killed her that during the struggle she had cut him on the neck with that steel claw, but

when I spoke of it he groaned and said, "I steeped it in a tetanus culture I invented. I meant it for her, but hadn't time to use it."

'That cut on his brother's foot was his initial mistake, of course; that and the finger-prints on the razor made me certain a cunning crime had been committed, for Sven Larsen *had no corns!*

'Write out the case for me and photograph all the exhibits. I'll keep them in my archives.'

EPISODE VII

IN THE SÉANCE ROOM

'I CAN pit myself against the criminals of *this* world,' M. Bertillon exclaimed angrily, 'and have achieved some few passable results, but when it comes to fighting a ghost or a spirit, why, I am afraid anthropometrical photographs, finger-prints, and the like, are useless. Even your friend Bannister's forty-five automatic, of which he is so fond, would be of no avail. And from what I hear, the ghost used a knife with deadly effect!'

'You are joking, sir, of course!' I said, surprised at the outburst.

'Eh, non, my friend, I am serious! From what Rousseau reports, a man was killed at a spiritualistic séance yesterday. Here is his report. Listen to this:

'Last night, eight people assembled at the house of Paul Canette, a medium, in the Villa Plaisance at Neuilly. The séance was organised by a woman named Madame Lafargue, who, it seems, has great faith in the medium's powers and arranged for several sittings. This Canette has been repeatedly exposed for fraud, nevertheless there are still many who believe in him. The lights were turned out as usual, and the eight people sat with their hands on a round table. Nothing happened for a time, then quite unexpectedly — for Canette does not profess to be a direct voice medium — a loud voice was heard speaking in Spanish. Apparently no one there understood Spanish. A choking cry followed upon the message, which was quite short. Then there was a crash and a heavy fall. Someone instantly switched on the light. The medium was unconscious and lying sideways in his chair to which he had been bound, whilst a man named Janos sprawled on the floor. He was dead and the handle of a queer dagger protruded from his breast.

'Now, what do you think of that?'

'The sitting was not genuine, of course, and one of the persons present stabbed the man, an easy matter in the dark.'

'Oh, that is your opinion, is it? Well, we shall see. The police were at once called, and the names of the sitters taken. They are all well-known and respectable people. They were searched and have been detained pending my investigation. The premises were also explored. The medium appeared to be in a state of collapse, and had to be carried to his bedroom, where a doctor is attending him. Since the murdered man was quite dead, he was left where he fell, and the door immediately locked. A gendarme has remained on guard. The medium was brought to his senses only after much trouble. He swears that he was in a trance and remembers nothing. Now get your outfit; we are going there immediately.'

I sprang eagerly to my feet, for long experience had taught me that when M. Bertillon consented to investigate in person, it was because his flair had sensed an unusual crime.

The Villa Plaisance, in the street of that name at Neuilly, was remarkable as a vestige of the days when the suburb had been composed only of country houses standing in their own grounds. The usual Parisian mansion had replaced most of these, but the villa still boasted a paved forecourt protected by heavy iron gates. The rear of the building was only separated from the lofty trees of the Bois de Boulogne by the tram-lines of the service connecting Neuilly with Saint-Cloud.

Rousseau had been lounging in the hall awaiting our arrival, and at once led the way up wide handsome stairs to the first floor.

The presence of a gendarme, standing stiffly erect before double oaken doors, indicated the room where the tragedy had occurred.

'I have sent for the people who were here last night,' Rousseau said. 'According to your instructions, Chief, they are detained in separate rooms and are being brought in closed cars, one at a time, so that they cannot communicate with each other. An officer will remain with them when they arrive. My report was necessarily short, but nothing has been moved, the windows have remained closed, and the servants are guarded by my men. During the séance the doors were locked on the inside, but the key remained in the lock.'

'I see,' said M. Bertillon thoughtfully. 'Is it a hollow key?'

'No; the end could have been gripped by those special pliers which are designed to fit into keyholes.'

'You call them *ouistiti*, don't you?' Bertillon asked with a smile. 'You have one, of course.'

'Naturally, monsieur; I always carry my tools.'

'Well, then, when I am in the room I'll lock the door again. Open it as a burglar would. I wish to ascertain whether the people sitting with the medium could have heard the noise.'

'That doesn't fit in with your theory that the murder was committed by a spirit,' I hazarded.

'No, I know that, but when I investigate I naturally slip into the groove of firmly established habits. Besides, I don't believe that those who live on another plane, if there is such a thing, can come back to harm us. All right, Rousseau, I see there are no marks or scratches on the door. Open it carefully. I want to visualise the scene.'

The atmosphere of the room was well calculated to

impress the senses. A black velvet portière was draped in heavy folds before the door, and curtains of the same material covered the window. The ceiling, too, was lofty and painted black, but on its surface glittered silver stars and a crescent moon. A thick carpet deadened our footfalls, and, when I pulled one of the curtains aside, I saw that heavy shutters were locked across the inside of the window. A faint breath of Oriental perfume lingered in the air and added its note of strangeness. When M. Bertillon closed the door, we stood in a darkness and silence so complete that, had it not been for the pounding of my heart and the drumming of the blood in my ears, I could have believed myself dead and buried. It was the rayless night of the grave, and the thought that the victim of a crime committed only a few hours since still lay on the floor made me shiver with superstitious dread. Involuntarily I snapped on the light from my pocket torch and stepped toward the switches.

M. Bertillon turned impatiently and motioned me to wait. 'I have a reason for standing in the dark for a moment,' he said, 'but I admit it is not pleasant. Well, switch on all the lamps now. You need not trouble to test the door, Rousseau. It's clear no sound can penetrate to this room.'

I needed no second bidding and flooded the place with welcome light. There were several bracket lamps and a central chandelier, but all were controlled by switches near the door. Oriental stools and inlaid octagonal tables were scattered about, for the room was very large, and the centre was occupied by a massive circular table of polished mahogany. Around this were several chairs, two of which had been overturned. Lying in a twisted position on the ground, one leg still entangled in the crossbars of a chair, was the murdered

man. The long narrow haft of a knife, which glittered as I moved forward, projected from the breast just above the heart and indicated clearly how he had been killed. A pool of blood had soaked into the carpet, and one hand and cuff were stained darkly crimson. The man was middle-aged, with a round, fleshy face and a short moustache. This and his glossy black hair gave him a swarthy Southern appearance. He was dressed in evening clothes and a handsome ring sparkled on his blood-stained hand. I saw that the handle of the weapon was of ebony inlaid with gold in a curious design. It was the gleam from this which had caught my eye. The ends of a long thin rope, cut in several places, were dangling from the back and sides of an armchair on the opposite side of the table. This was evidently where the medium had sat, bound in the usual manner. Just behind this was a square cabinet formed by two columns, one white and one black, supporting a wooden canopy, from which ample velvet curtains were suspended. At a sign from Bertillon, I tugged at a silken cord looped over a hook in the wall, and the curtains swung noiselessly aside, disclosing a round stool covered with withered flowers.

'Go carefully to work,' M. Bertillon cautioned me. 'That table with its polished surface will be like an open book to us. Spray the chairs also, but let me look at the marks before you transfer them to your gelatin slips.'

When I had completed my task, we saw that the sitters had left the imprints of their finger-tips clearly traced, at equal distances. Those who sat at each side of the medium had rested only one hand on the table, and, curiously enough, in every case the print of the little finger was missing.

Bertillon nodded in a satisfied manner. 'Yes — they linked their little fingers together and those next to the

medium held his hands. That's good. Now number them in their order. See, there are long smudges and blood-stains where the murdered man sat. Those smudges were made when he jerked his hands away as he fell. What beats me is how the devil, with a table five feet in diameter in the way, any living being could stab him in front? H'm — take a flashlight photograph of the scene, and then we will look at the man himself.'

When this had been done, Bertillon stooped and turned the body over. He started back instantly with a hoarse cry. 'Good Heavens! Look at this!' In the centre of the white shirt-front was the crimson impress of a hand, fingers widely apart, as though the murderer had deliberately planned to leave a clue to his identity. Rousseau stared at the ghastly token with dilated eyes, but almost at once his gaze narrowed.

'I have been informed that not more than a minute elapsed before the lights were switched on,' he cried. 'How could a man have had time, in the dark, to leave that horrible mark with such accuracy? It looks like blood, too, but there would have been none on the carpet at the time the blow was struck, and the stains on the table do not appear to have been touched.'

We stared at each other in silence for a minute. The same thought was in our minds. No living hand had left that sign. My gaze wandered round the sombre room, with its heavy draperies and twinkling silver stars. The weight of a malevolent intelligence, watching us mockingly, oppressed me.

Bertillon straightened up and seized Rousseau by the arm.

'Have the people you detained had an opportunity of washing their hands?' he snapped.

'Of course not, Chief. I saw to that; and they were

THE IMPRINT OF MARINETTI'S BLOODSTAINED HAND
ON THE SHIRT-FRONT OF JANOS

THE KNIFE FOUND BURIED IN THE HEART OF JANOS

searched, too. I should have noticed a blood-stained hand at once.'

Bertillon rested one knee on the floor and examined the knife with his lenses; then he measured the angle of the handle.

'Downwards, of course,' he muttered; 'a distinct slope. Well — take the weapon to the laboratory at once and test it for finger-prints. Cut out that mark also. I'll question the medium first and then the others.'

The story as we pieced it together was that a wealthy lady, Madame Lafargue, who was known to be a zealous psychic investigator, had invited several friends and acquaintances to a sitting at the Villa Plaisance, in order to test the powers of the medium Paul Canette. Canette had created quite a stir in psychic circles when he first came to Paris, but several bad exposures of fraudulent practices had caused researchers to shun his place. There had been an acrimonious controversy in the papers as the result, for a few still believed that, although he had stooped to trickery, he was a true medium. It was in order to test this that Madame Lafargue had arranged for the sitting. Canette had insisted that a member of the press should be present and had introduced a M. Kurt Janos, as the representative of some obscure psychic paper.

Madame Lafargue had taken minute precautions against trickery. The carpet was lifted at the edges to see if there were any electric wires underneath, and it had been tacked down again firmly. The cabinet under the canopy was examined and the room carefully searched. The door was then locked and seals placed at the top and bottom, but the horror produced by the tragedy had been so overwhelming that naturally no one looked to see if these were intact before opening it.

Those placed on the window were unbroken, however. It was Madame Lafargue and the unknown pressman who had bound Canette to the chair. The switches were near the door, quite fifteen feet from the table, and Madame Lafargue had turned the lights out and had then taken her place next to M. Janos. The medium immediately appeared to go into a trance, and his breathing became stertorous. For a time nothing had happened except that a few flowers had fallen on the table. Suddenly a harsh loud voice, which to everyone's astonishment appeared to proceed from a distant corner of the room, cried, 'Rafael Cortez, Rafael Cortez!'

'I am sure that was the name,' Madame Lafargue declared firmly, 'although the intonation was foreign. The letter *o* notably was curiously sonorous, not like our French vowel sound at all. For a minute after this name had been called twice there was silence. I was about to put a question to the Presence, when I felt a violent twitching at my right hand, which was linked to that of M. Janos. Then abruptly there followed a rapid stream of words which sounded like Spanish, although I do not understand that language. There was no mistaking the tone, however; it was threatening and triumphant. As the voice ceased, I noticed a faint greenish light over the table and at the same instant the man next me gave a loud groan. His hand jerked upwards. I heard his chair crash against the table and a heavy thud on the carpet. We all shrieked with terror. Something terrible was happening in the dark, and I suppose that we all lost our heads for a moment. I remember that someone yelled, "The lights, for God's sake, the lights!" At that I tried to feel my way towards the door, but my foot caught in the overturned chair and I fell. At the same moment someone found the switches and I saw the man Janos

lying on the floor with a dagger in his breast and his face streaked with blood. Oh, it was horrible, horrible!'

This story was corroborated by the others. For a time no one had thought of the medium, who had either fainted from terror or was still in a trance. Then one of Madame Lafargue's friends had cut the ropes which bound him, and he was carried out and placed on a bed. Madame Lafargue had also, with rare presence of mind, ordered everyone from the room and sent for a doctor and the police. When the doctor reported that M. Janos was dead, the commissionaire had shut the room and telephoned to the Sûreté. Paul Canette's statement, when he finally regained consciousness, was that he had been in a trance. Whilst in that state he had vaguely felt that something evil had occurred, but what it was he did not know. The man was shaking with terror and almost hysterical, and the doctor diagnosed severe shock and suggested that a nurse should stay with Canette, besides the police officer who guarded him.

When we had obtained these statements, we returned to headquarters, leaving Rousseau at the Villa Plaisance to superintend the removal of the body. Two experts from the identity department also photographed those who had been on the premises when the murder was committed, and took their finger-prints.

I worked feverishly for the remainder of the day, and the next morning carried the result of my labours to M. Bertillon.

'Well?' he queried sharply, as I entered and placed a series of enlargements I had made from the gelatine transfers, on his table.

'The hand which drove home that knife was a large one,' I said, 'because only the edges of the first phalanges have left their trace on the handle, but they are indubi-

tably the same as those on the linen. These are the photographs of the finger-tips I obtained from the table and they correspond to those taken from the sitters by our men; I have also those of the medium. *None resemble the mark left on the shirt.*'

M. Bertillon examined my work critically; then he motioned me to a seat.

'I expected something like this. But I admit I had vaguely suspected the medium. He was the only one who did not leave his signature on that polished table. It is true the man who cut the ropes declares that the knots were intact, but that, of course, proves nothing. Yet clever though he may be, he could hardly yell from a corner of the room, find his way in the dark to the man at the table, kill him, steep his hand in blood, press it accurately on the linen, and slip into the ropes again before the lights were turned up. Besides, he would guess we should take an impress of his hands. He was not left an instant alone, and there was no trace of blood on them. So far our only clue is the name Rafael Cortez. I have asked Dufresne to get me all the information he can about Paul Canette and the murdered man. Leave these photographs with me. The records shall investigate the past of all these people. Some may be living under assumed names. Calorbier is hunting up all charts with names sounding like Cortez. Meanwhile go to Neuilly and see if you can be of assistance to Colbert, who is searching the Villa Plaisance.'

The papers had printed various fantastic versions of the crime, for Madame Lafargue and her friends had been released temporarily, although their movements were being watched, and several enterprising reporters had already interviewed them. The idea of supernatural agency was of course emphatically ridiculed and the

medium more or less pointedly accused. I therefore expected to find the usual morbid crowd collected round the villa, but Colbert had placed plain-clothes officers on guard, and their presence frightened away the curious. Colbert had completed his search when I arrived, and was about to leave.

'Nothing,' he said laconically, with an expressive gesture — 'not a sign. It beats me. Rousseau is still with Canette, who is in a sullen mood, and sticks to his story that he knows nothing. In his room we found a curious photograph, which a cyclist has just taken to headquarters, but that is all.'

'I'll just have a look round all by myself, then,' I said. 'I can't sit still and wait. Let me know if I'm wanted.'

Colbert shrugged his shoulders and handed me the key of the séance room.

The servants were being questioned at the quai des Orfévres, and the house was silent and deserted. Once more I entered that sinister room. The body was no longer there; otherwise everything was the same. For an hour I crawled about the floor with lamp and lenses, inspected the walls and curtains, and tested the locks on the shutters. I had my theory, and thrilled with a wild hope that, where others had failed, I might succeed. The black ceiling with its silver stars and moon fascinated me. Going to the next floor, I found that above it was a large, sparsely furnished room with a bare floor, which looked promising and fitted in with my theory. Encouraged by this, I inserted the blade of my knife between the boards one by one and tried to prize them loose. To my disgust I found they were all firmly nailed down. I was still on my knees examining the joints with my lenses, when instinct warned me that someone was watching my movements. Twisting sharply round, I

was in time to see an evil, malignant face peering round the open door. It was instantly withdrawn, but I leapt simultaneously with its disappearance and caught a glimpse of a hunched shape as it slipped noiselessly into a room at the end of the passage. There was a scream in a woman's voice, and as I threw open the door Rousseau came running up the stairs. I perceived that it was the medium's bedroom. In a corner was the professional nurse the doctor had sent, with hands raised in terror, and the man who had spied on me trying vainly to calm her fears. It was the medium Paul Canette, and now that I could examine him closely, I was inclined to share the suspicions of the public. Two tiny cunning eyes with heavy drooping lids glared at me from under overhanging brows. The mouth, half hidden by a moustache, was cruel and vindictive, whilst the high, dome-like head, entirely bald, gave the man the appearance of a malevolent genius. The body was squat and muscular.

'Why were you watching me?' I demanded.

'I heard a noise. Since this terrible murder my nerves are strung to breaking-point. The nurse was asleep, so I crept to the open door to see what was happening.'

'I was not asleep,' the nurse cried indignantly. 'I was sitting by the window reading. Suddenly when I looked up the bed was empty. I swear the door did not open. I was just going to call monsieur there, who had told me not to lose sight of my patient, when he slipped in like a shadow. I refuse to stay here alone again.'

Rousseau looked at me meaningly.

'All right,' he growled; 'from now on I stay here and watch you, my fine fellow. You have learnt to move noiselessly, it appears. Well, see if you can trick *me*. Send one of the men up,' he added to me in an undertone; 'we'll relay each other.'

I reported the incident to my chief, whom I found in consultation with M. Dufresne and Colbert.

'I'm not surprised,' Bertillon said, 'but the man's explanation may be true. However, I have his record here. *He is Rafael Cortez*, a Mexican. His record is a bad one, but hardly a criminal one. He and Janos, who was born in Hungary, and against whom there is no recorded conviction, belonged to a secret society, some anarchist group, when they were young. They got into trouble in Marseilles many years ago and were arrested, together with an Italian named Marinetti. Cortez and Janos turned informers and got off, but Marinetti was sentenced to a short term of imprisonment and deportation. Two years later, a rich demi-mondaine, known as Yvonne d'Argent, was murdered in the rue Faidher and her jewellery stolen. Marinetti had returned secretly to Paris, and the evidence against him was overwhelming. The chief witness against the Italian was this Cortez, whose friend the dead woman had been. Marinetti was sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted to lifelong imprisonment in Cayenne. Several years later, Marinetti was shot whilst trying to escape. His death is recorded on his chart and in the official dossier.'

For a moment Bertillon ceased, as though unwilling to continue, then he added, 'M. Dufresne brought me a report of the trial. Marinetti protested his innocence to the last and claimed that the woman had been murdered by Cortez and Janos, who had planned it all so that he should be guillotined. When Marinetti heard the sentence, he yelled: "Alive or dead, I'll find you both, you fiends, and Josetta will help me." Who Josetta is I don't know. *But the finger-prints on the knife and the shirt are those of the dead convict!* No doubt is possible on that score.'

I sat motionless. Before me rose a vision of that gloomy chamber. I tried to visualize the tense sitters grouped round the table, the sudden harsh voice calling 'Rafael Cortez, Rafael Cortez,' and then the blow in the dark which drove the knife to the heart of one of those whom Marinetti had vowed to kill.

The voice of Dufresne roused me.

It's all nonsense, of course. Some clever trick; and perhaps this Josetta is at the bottom of it. We shall learn the truth by searching the records just prior to the murder of Yvonne d'Argent.'

'But finger-prints, man!' Bertillon exclaimed. 'You can't explain them away. And they were not faked as in the Van Bromen case; I've looked for that. Look, here is the chart of the convict, with the word 'Deceased' across it in red. I've cabled to Cayenne for confirmation of his death, but our administration doesn't say a man is dead if he isn't.'

'I don't know,' said M. Dufresne doggedly. 'Mistakes have occurred, although I don't suggest that it is so this time. Doesn't it strike you, however, that this dead man's finger-prints are just a bit too evident? I mean, that it looks as though they had been purposely made as glaring as possible. We couldn't miss them. The man who made them knows all about our system. He knew that we should find that chart. It's no use; I'll never believe a dead man can come back and commit murder. Let me look again at that snapshot Colbert found in the medium's room, please. There are palms in the background.' Dufresne mused, when Bertillon had handed him a small photograph. 'Palms? That would be somewhere in the tropics, and Cortez is a Mexican. That tall fellow on the left in Hungarian dress might be Janos, for he comes from Hungary, and the short, thick-

set man Cortez. This picture was probably taken when they were young. The bull looks like the kind they breed in the Argentine. You'll enlarge it, of course. I must get in touch with the police in South America. If my guess is right, Janos and Cortez have been partners in the past before they came to France.

'Well, monsieur, to-morrow evening we will reconstruct the tragedy. The same sitters shall take their places where they sat before. The medium shall be bound in his chair. We shall all be present and try to understand what happened. Rousseau shall take the part of the murdered man.'

I confess my heart beat quickly when we climbed the stairs of the Villa Plaisance the next evening. A cable had arrived from the Governor of Cayenne. Marinetti had been shot through the head by a guard, and was buried where he fell. Cortez, alias Canette, refused point-blank to enter the séance room again until Dufresne informed him coldly that his past was known, and, that unless he consented, he would be arrested for the murder of Kurt Janos.

Trembling and pale as death, each person sat down again in his place. Rousseau, trying his best to look unconcerned, sat next to Madame Lafargue. The table was wiped clean and they placed their linked hands on its surface.

No detail was neglected. Bertillon locked the door and placed seals at the top and bottom. The curtains were drawn around the cabinet, and Dufresne and I bound Rafael Cortez to his chair.

'Now,' said Dufresne, placing the knife which had killed Janos in the centre of the table, 'whoever stabbed the man who sat where Rousseau is could not possibly have reached him across the table. He must have come

from behind. Even then I don't see ——' And at that second every light went out.

'Sit still, everybody,' Dufresne thundered. 'We are here, and no one can harm you. Quick, try those switches, Colbert.'

'Let no one move,' a harsh, inhuman voice snarled unexpectedly. It appeared to come from a distant corner, but in the dark it was impossible to locate it with certainty. At the sound Madame Lafargue screamed: 'The murderer, the murderer — that's his voice!'

'Who spoke?' Dufresne called loudly. Instantly the unknown cried:

'Rafael Cortez, Rafael Cortez. *La muerte esta aqui!* Remember Josetta.'

A horrible wailing moan sounded on the last word, followed by screams and yells of terror from all sides, and the crash of falling chairs.

'Sit still!' Dufresne shouted again despairingly. 'Why don't you use your torches, some of you?'

I had stood motionless until then, hypnotised by the horror of this tragedy in the dark; but his words brought me to my senses, I pulled a lamp from my pocket and flashed its rays round the room. Colbert was by the door fumbling helplessly at the switches. Bertillon and Dufresne loomed behind me, rigid, their faces glistening with beads of perspiration; the men and women round the table stood clasping each other or wringing their hands, the picture of abject fear. I saw that Rousseau had pulled a pistol from his pocket, but, as the light flickered over the medium, still bound in his chair, he dropped it with a yell.

Cortez was drooping forward, upheld only by the rope. The knife which a moment before had been lying on the table, had been driven into his neck with such violence

that the long handle still vibrated from the force of the blow, and, crowning horror of all, the imprint of a blood-stained hand showed clearly on the bald, dome-shaped head.

'Lights!' Bertillon called fiercely, springing forward. 'Is there only one torch in the room? No, don't open that door yet; look at the seals.'

For a time we were all crazed, and no wonder. That an invisible murderer should commit a crime in a room full of police was outside our experience. Little by little, however, order was restored. The terrified people were persuaded to sit quietly whilst a doctor was fetched, and Rousseau and Colbert ran downstairs to find out why the lights had failed. Meanwhile, we had obtained two head-lamps from a Sûreté car, and at once examined the medium. He was quite dead. The blade had pierced between two vertebræ. A superficial scrutiny of the crimson stain on his head with powerful lenses convinced us that it had been made by the same hand which had marked Janos, although we could not be sure until we had photographed and enlarged it. The doctor now came hurrying in, but he could only confirm our diagnosis. Cortez must have died instantly. Bertillon was still examining the haft of the knife when the lamps suddenly blazed up again. A sigh of relief came from all. After scrutinising their hands, Bertillon ordered Madame Lafargue and her friends to wait downstairs under Rousseau's guard. Colbert returned as they were crowding out of the room. He looked at Bertillon with a queer smile.

'Someone pulled out the main fuse,' he said. 'I found it lying on the ground. Furthermore, that someone must have burnt himself badly; he forgot that since the lamps were all on, there would be a fierce arc. It has melted the clips.'

'But why the fuse? Why not the main switch?'

'Because a gendarme was sitting in the kitchen near the switchboard. The fuses are in the wine-cellar. With your permission we'll just look at the servants.'

This was the first step in the right direction. A man named Jules Ruick had a large angry blister on the right index finger. He was at once taken to the dépôt. Our investigation continued until midnight, for the removal of a fuse by the servant definitely routed all thoughts of supernatural intervention. Bertillon laughed a little shamefacedly when Dufresne mentioned this.

'I confess I was almost convinced Marinetti had come back from beyond. It's evident that either Ruick is the murderer, or the Italian did not die in Cayenne, and Ruick is his confederate. How on earth did they do it, though?'

We had just decided to abandon our quest for that night, when Colbert suddenly gave an exclamation. The wall inside the psychic cabinet was decorated with a complex design of squares and triangles, and on one of these he had found a single dark imprint.

'That's blood!' Bertillon cried excitedly, rapping and pressing all around the mark. For a minute nothing happened; then, as he placed a thumb on the centre of the square below the stain the whole wall swung noiselessly inwards, revealing a narrow passage running parallel with the room. At the extreme end were steep, winding stairs. Bertillon pointed to faint needle-like rays of light which pierced the wall.

'Peepholes,' he said. 'That's how the assassin watched and listened. Come along, but make no noise.'

The stairs led us to a door which opened into the cellar where Colbert found the fuse. It was obviously the way the mysterious murderer had come and gone.

'Conceal a man in this cellar,' Dufresne ordered. 'We can do nothing more here. If Marinetti is still alive, we must find him.'

A further surprise awaited us at headquarters. The chief of the records, M. Calorbier, had brought a number of photographs of men and women to Bertillon's office. They were those who had given evidence at Marinetti's trial, and one of them strangely resembled Ruick. Cleverly handled by M. Dufresne, the man became entangled in so many contradictory statements that his complicity was no longer in doubt, although he strenuously denied having committed the murders.

Detectives thereupon questioned Ruick all through the night, until, worn out at last, he confessed that he had also been a member of the secret society to which Marinetti had once belonged. Cortez, their leader, had left them all in the lurch when their revolutionary activities were discovered. As a consequence, many of them were sent to prison. Thus, when, two years ago, Marinetti suddenly reappeared as one risen from the dead, Ruick had willingly helped him to trace Cortez. They had found him at last, posing as the medium Paul Canette, and with him, acting as his confederate, was Kurt Janos. The Mexican evidently believed that he had changed beyond recognition, for when Ruick called at the Villa Plaisance and proffered his services as assistant, Cortez had accepted.

After a few months he had been shown how to enter silently through the secret door and to produce trick phenomena. It had been agreed that at the first big séance, with many sitters present and Cortez bound to a chair, the Italian would enter through the cabinet and kill first Janos and then the Mexican. After the room had been locked by the police, Marinetti had returned

and left his blood-stained finger-prints on the dead man's linen.

Ruick's confession helped us considerably in spreading our nets for Marinetti. A week later, he was captured, disguised as an old woman, just as he boarded a ship bound for Callao.

His story, as he related it to the *juge d'instruction*, was fiercely tragic and pathetic. I obtained a copy of the greffiers' shorthand notes, so that I can outline it briefly.

'If ever there was a devil in human shape, monsieur,' he began, 'it was that Mexican dog, Rafael Cortez, a cruel, lustful, and cunning devil. I met him for the first time when I was a rider on a ranch near Colpaz. My parents had emigrated from Palermo to South America when I was a boy. That meeting blighted my life. He was the leader of a secret revolutionary society, and urged me to join. My Sicilian blood tempted me, and I swore the fearful oath which bound all the members. Then I fell in love with Josetta Perez, the sweetest soul on this earth. Her people were wealthy and proud of their pure Castilian descent, and I was only a poor gaucho, but she loved me passionately, and we decided to run away. Cortez followed us, and threatened to set his men on me for deserting the cause of anarchy. I didn't know then that he coveted my wife. She was terrified of Cortez, and begged me to leave the country, so we fled to Marseilles, and for a time we were happy. I had obtained a good position with a company dealing in South American produce, for I spoke Spanish fluently. But Cortez had spies in France, and one day when I came home I found him waiting for me. There was no shaking him off, although I refused to return to Mexico. With the help of his partner, Kurt Janos, he succeeded

in involving me in a stabbing affray, and although I merely acted in self-defence, the French courts sentenced me to a year's imprisonment and deported me to Italy. As soon as I was free, I travelled to Paris, where Josetta was living under an assumed name. Her family had sent her some money, and with the little she had saved, we started life afresh. My Josetta sat as model at an art school, for she was very beautiful; I worked in a shipping office. We both hoped that by now the Mexican had forgotten us. One evening, whilst we were dining in a restaurant on the Boulevards, we perceived him sitting at a table not far away, and with him was a woman. It was the poor creature whom he afterwards murdered. He nodded to us in amiable fashion and came to our table for a cup of coffee. I thought it best to be civil for Josetta's sake, and so for a time we became friendly again. I had seen no sign of Janos, and did not guess that he was constantly shadowing me. It was shortly after this meeting that I began to notice a change in my wife. Her face was pale and drawn, and often when I returned from my work I would see the trace of tears on her cheeks. At last I demanded to know what was on her mind, and she confessed that during my absence Cortez constantly persecuted her with his attentions. At that I flew into a rage. Instead of going to my office the next day, I watched the house from a near-by café. When I saw the Mexican dog enter, I followed and caught him on the stairs. He struggled desperately, but I was strong then, and thrashed him thoroughly. A week later, all Paris was discussing the assassination of Yvonne d'-Argent.

'I was accused of the murder! Her jewellery was found in my room, and the handkerchief which strangled her was identified by the laundry mark as belonging to me.

I could not prove where I had been the evening the crime was committed, for I had been watching my own house because the Mexican had stopped Josetta in the street the day before, and told her he would come when I was out and kidnap her. My previous conviction went against me, as did the fight on the stairs. The woman had been a friend of Cortez, and he and Janos stated on oath that they had noticed me near the house. Even the concierge identified me as the man who had passed her window. I was, as you know, sentenced to death. But I swear, monsieur, that I am innocent of that crime. It was a plot engineered by that devil. Josetta fled to her people in Mexico, and a year later I received a letter in Cayenne in which she told me that she intended to live in Pernambuco. I realised that the brave girl meant to help me to escape. I must not tell you how it was done, but after that we corresponded regularly. Life was a hell, but there was hope! Only two things mattered — my wife and vengeance. Alive or dead, I had sworn to kill Cortez and his partner, and I meant to keep that oath. I *have* kept it. At last, after I had spent three years felling trees and making roads in the penal settlement, I received the welcome news that an Indian pirogue would be hidden in the creek called the Devil's Pool, and that two Indians would be camped there for a month waiting for me. My chance came two weeks later. Josetta had paid a large sum to a Chinaman in the convict town, who promised to have clothes and food ready for me. And one night I and three comrades set out for the Devil's Pool. That march through the poisonous jungle was a nightmare. Our food soon gave out and we were weak and ill. Then, to crown it all, guards caught sight of us as we camped not a day's march from the spot where the Indians waited, and shot one of my

companions. I changed clothes with him and stuffed letters and papers into his pockets. I knew that by the time he was found, the ants would have done their work and the guards would believe that I had been killed and officially report my death.

'So we reached a tiny town on the coast, where Josetta waited. Oh, monsieur, it was worth it all, but the gods have never been kind to me. The hardships Josetta had endured and the shock of my terrible sentence had undermined her strength. She died a month after reaching Pernambuco. For a time grief crazed me, although no doubt it also saved me, for I was well hidden in the asylum. When at last sanity returned, I was as you see me now — an old, embittered man, though not thirty-five. But the thought of revenge made me strong and cunning. I had the money my sweet wife had brought me, and I earned more. Years passed before I finally traced Cortez to Paris. He had become the medium Paul Canette, and he rarely went out. I should never have found him if I had not seen Janos enter the Villa Plaisance one day. Ruick thereupon obtained a post in the house and showed me the secret passage. Then, when I learned that a lady had arranged for several sittings, I realised that the longed-for moment had arrived. You know what happened. I had at first intended to kill both the same evening, but then I reflected that if I killed Janos first, Cortez, who believed me to be dead, would suffer all the tortures of a man condemned to die and waiting in agony for the inevitable. That is why I spoke to him in Spanish and told him that death was near. I also left my mark on Janos so that Cortez should believe I had returned from the grave. Men of his stamp are so superstitious that I fully expected him to become crazed with terror. I had no fear for myself, for officially I was

buried in Cayenne. I intended to wait some time before killing the beast, but I learned that Madame Lafargue, had given the police the name "Rafael Cortez" correctly. I realised that with this clue the Sûreté would soon arrive at the truth. So I had to act quickly. The presence of the detectives didn't bother me. I felt sure that after the second uncanny death they would believe that it had been brought about by supernatural means. And so they would have done if that fool Ruick hadn't burnt his finger and dropped the fuse.'

Six months later, Marinetti and his two accomplices were brought up before the Paris Assize.

The trial caused a sensation and the public enclosure was crowded. Marinetti insisted on relating his Odyssey again in court, and so impressed the judges and jury that he escaped with a sentence of ten years. His counsel also sent a petition to the President of the Republic, M. Fallières, pleading for a revision of the former trial, but before any decision could be taken, Marinetti became insane. He died in an asylum at Charenton. Ruick was sentenced to five years. He made a strange statement just before the jury retired. Always when helping Cortez with his deceptions he had felt that unseen presences were around him in the dark, and several times mysterious voices had murmured in his ear, 'You are making a mockery of sacred things. You will all be punished for it, and punishment is not far away.'

When we returned to headquarters after the trial, M. Bertillon handed me the Mexican knife which had killed the two scoundrels Cortez and Janos.

'Put this in the museum,' he said. 'If ever I am again tempted to believe in the supernatural I shall go and look at it. Marinetti was quite right. If Ruick had not

burnt his finger and dropped the fuse, we might never have solved the mystery.'

'I am not sure, after all, that there was not "something beyond our guess" helping Marinetti,' Dufresne said thoughtfully. 'If that man was not guided by unseen powers to what I believe was a just vengeance, then there is no truth in any religion, and I am, as you know, a religious man.'

The report of the trial can be found in the 'Gazette des Tribunaux,' Paris edition, March, 1910, under the heading, 'Procès Marinetti, déjà condamné à mort et échappé du bagne.'

EPISODE VIII

THE 'HAPPY DEATH'

LEBRUN, the little Sûreté analyst, came into my office with a rueful face.

'This serum is delicate stuff to prepare,' he said. 'Ten of my rabbits died last week, and I've had to start again. I managed to make a few superficial tests, however, by drawing off the single precious drop that remained into a capillary tube.'

'Well,' I queried, 'with what result? Human or animal blood?'

'Human blood — I believe — but it might be from a pig. However, since pigs don't generally travel in taxis ——' and he shrugged his shoulders with a whimsical smile.

'That's not the point,' said the voice of M. Bertillon from the door, where he had stood for a moment unnoticed by us. 'Inferences are useless. The blood-stains which have been found twice in the same taxi need not be the vestiges of a murder. They may have been deliberately left to lead us astray. You do not know what they are, then?'

'No, sir, as yet I cannot be sure. Under the microscope the blood of a pig is the same as a man's. Only the positive reaction of the serum can be depended upon.'

'Very well, then we have to wait until you have prepared more, but since that will take some time, our investigation must meanwhile accept the theory that a crime has been committed. It is more than likely, but I don't like building a positive edifice on a negative foundation.'

'No bodies have been found yet?' I questioned curiously.

'Oh, yes — two. But there is nothing to connect them definitely with the taxi mystery. Come to my office and I will let you have the details, such as they are. There is some delicate laboratory work in store for us, and I'd like you to know where we stand before you begin.'

'I think I remember the circumstances,' I hazarded. 'Two months ago the taxi 469-Y-29 was found abandoned on the road to Le Havre. It belonged to a garage proprietor in Caen, and had been driven by a chauffeur named Raolle. The man who discovered the car at once informed the local police, and they carried out a preliminary inquiry. There were blood-stains on the dashboard, blood had soaked into the cocoanut matting on the floor, and the upholstery was also stained.'

Bertillon nodded without speaking, and I saw that he was checking my account of the case from his own notes.

'Nothing has been heard of the driver from that day to this. Who the passenger was is still unknown ——'

'That is what the newspapers reported,' my chief interrupted, 'but we have every reason to believe that the car had been hired by a jeweller named Cottin. The jeweller disappeared, and his business was found to be on the verge of bankruptcy. There was hardly any stock and many debts. Whether Cottin murdered the chauffeur or *vice versa*, I don't know. I was not called in. The car was repainted, and sent out on the road again. Four weeks ago the same fatal taxi was discovered abandoned in a deserted country road. Again there were blood-stains on the driver's seat and on the cushions in the car. Whether it is human blood or not, only the serum Lebrun is preparing will show. Émile Codorin, the chauffeur, has not been seen since leaving the garage.

We believe that the passenger was a young fellow named Étienne Lafontaine, manager of the big iron works at Rouen. He had been drinking heavily and generally going the pace for some time previously. He has vanished also. As I said, only two bodies have been found recently. One was taken from the river and had been in the water so long that it cannot be identified, but the clothes appear to be those of the first driver Raolle. The other was found on the railway line and was so mangled that recognition by relatives is impossible. The taxi is now believed to be haunted, and no one will drive it. Queer story, isn't it? Four men presumably dead in the same vehicle, but no bodies near the spot, and, so far as we know, no large sum of money stolen. Yet another mysterious disappearance is that of the banker Lastolle. No trace of him, either. A warrant had been issued for his arrest on a charge of embezzlement. He cleverly slipped through our fingers at the last minute, and, although detectives are watching every harbour and frontier station, he has vanished.'

'But what has Lastolle to do with taxi 469-Y-29?' I asked.

I am not suggesting that there is any connection, but it is a curious coincidence that his car was also found near Caen. Furthermore, he and the two missing passengers of the fatal taxi were in great financial difficulties. Lafontaine believed he was ruined, and told several people that he intended to commit suicide. He had invested all his money in those oil wells in Tonkin which were reported a swindle, but which unexpectedly turned out to be immensely rich. The shares which every one believed to be worthless have already jumped to double their original price. It may be, of course, that some madman is responsible for the death of all these people.

It is a pity I was not called in at once. However, there may still be something which the local police overlooked, so, since several days must elapse before Lebrun can prepare fresh serum, we will leave early to-morrow and inspect the débris of Lastolle's car and the mysterious taxi. I will send for you later when I have the result of the *post-mortem* on those two bodies.'

To my surprise and delight, when I opened the door of the laboratory, I perceived a tall, muscular figure standing by the window. One glance at the bronzed, clean-shaven face was sufficient.

'Bannister!' I cried, stepping eagerly forward and clasping his hand. 'I thought you were in New York!'

'I was, and I fully expected to stay there. But Paris still holds the record for queer happenings, so the chief sent me back to look into things.'

'What has New York to do with our latest puzzle?'

'I don't know yet, but Calder, the Wall Street broker, came to Paris six months ago to open an office. His wife has had no news of him, and there are many of his clients who would like to know what's become of their money. Then there is Hellor, the film star. He left his company when they'd finished their stunts on the Riviera. No one knows where he is, but his last letter was written from the rue de Rivoli. So I'm here to investigate.'

I shrugged my shoulders. 'They were not killed, or I should have heard of it. Probably the attractions of Montmartre proved stronger than those of Broadway. Have you seen Dufresne?'

'Yes; he is getting all the information he can from the special service that keeps a watch on foreigners. Meanwhile, I thought I'd look you up. Can you take me to Bertillon?'

I was about to go to the private telephone when the

door opened and a messenger informed me that my chief required my presence immediately. Seated in Bertillon's office was a young and deliciously pretty girl. Golden curly hair surrounded a vivacious, delicately tinted face. The eyes, as she turned and looked at us, were blue like an Italian sky, and the slightly tip-tilted nose gave a piquant touch to the expression, which was increased by the two dimples that suddenly appeared at sight of Bannister behind me.

'Why, Jim,' she cried in English, 'fancy seeing you here. This is luck. I am in such trouble.'

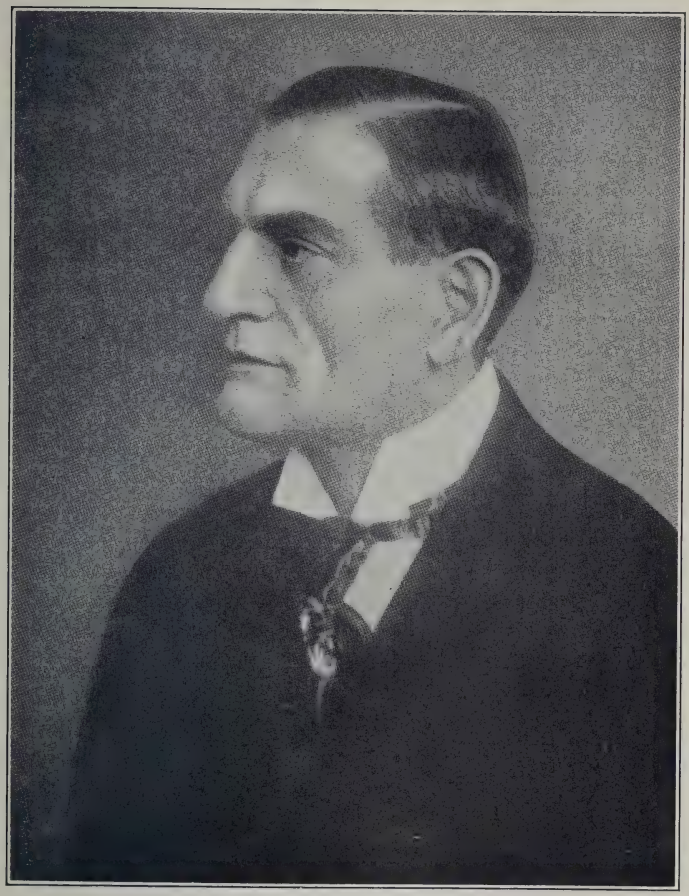
Bannister stared in surprise, then he sprang past me and seized the girl's outstretched hand. 'This is Miss Marcelle O'Connor,' he said, looking at us in turn. 'I don't know why she's in Paris — but if she needs help, count me in. Her people and mine were great friends out West.'

'Mademoiselle is greatly distressed,' Bertillon said, when he had greeted Bannister and we had all found seats, 'because her fiancé, Étienne Lafontaine, has disappeared. Strangely enough, we were discussing the case only a short time ago. Perhaps you will relate what you know once more, mademoiselle. But wait until Inspector Rousseau comes. I have sent for him.'

Miss O'Connor nodded and pulled out a bundle of papers. A few minutes later, Rousseau arrived. His face flushed with pleasure when he perceived Bannister, and a delighted grin transformed his rugged, weather-beaten face.

'Now, mademoiselle ——' our chief prompted.

'Well, although I was born in Colorado, my mother is French. Her family lives in Paris, and I often spent a month or two with them. It was at their house I met Étienne Lafontaine. I guess it was a case of love at first



JAMES P. BANNISTER

sight, and we were soon engaged. Our wedding had been fixed for this summer, so I remained with my aunt. I just couldn't bear the idea of not seeing Étienne every day, I love him so. But you know the saying about true love. Lately Étienne had been very unhappy. Something went wrong with his business. I heard him talking to uncle and gathered that he had gambled in stocks and gone the limit. Every penny of his money was sunk in some company in Indo-China, which hadn't made good.

'Finally he said we couldn't marry because he would never drag me down into poverty with him. As if I cared, so long as we were together. As the days passed and no news came from Saigon, he became moody and silent. I lived in constant terror of some desperate act on his part. Étienne has always been very highly strung and romantic. He was more a poet and dreamer than a business man. Then one day he received a long cable from the East. I went to his office and found him sitting at his desk with his head in his hands and before him was a gun. I am myself inclined to be emotional. The result was I called him a coward. I suppose we were both in a silly state of nerves. Anyhow, we quarrelled bitterly. I hoped to shame him into fighting on, but perhaps I said more than I should have done. When I left I carried the pistol away with me, but we had practically broken off our engagement. I never saw him again.' Tears rolled down the girl's cheeks, and she gulped convulsively. 'I heard that he began to spend his nights in cabarets and dance-halls — drinking with women of low repute. And then suddenly a month ago he disappeared. I received a last letter from him in which he bade me good-bye and informed me that he intended to take his own life. I learned only recently that on the day he wrote that letter Étienne had drawn all his money

from the bank — about eighty thousand francs, and that he had borrowed another twenty thousand from my uncle. That's why I've come to you. Étienne would never have borrowed money if he meant to kill himself. I'm afraid he's been murdered. He probably had the whole sum on him. Oh, my poor Étienne! If only we had not quarrelled! Those shares in the oil company are worth a fortune to-day.'

'Please give me the photograph of Étienne Lafontaine which I see you have in your bag,' said M. Bertillon. 'Thank you. I should also like to have a list of the places where he was last seen, and the names of his friends.'

'And do you think there is any hope, M. Bertillon? Has my poor Étienne been murdered, or is it possible that he is being kept a prisoner?'

'Our criminals do not hold people for ransom, mademoiselle, but do not despair yet. I will let you know the result of our search to-morrow.'

The next morning we gathered in M. Bertillon's office, ready for our trip to Caen, in order to examine the sinister blood-stained taxi and the charred remains of Lastolle's car. Bannister had insisted on joining us, and his presence was very welcome. The Sûreté could be trusted to do the spade work in his own investigation, and until this was completed, he was free to assist Miss O'Connor. Bertillon had gone to obtain the report of the doctors who were examining the two mutilated bodies which had been found. He appeared shortly before ten, and I saw by his expression that the result of the *post-mortem* was not satisfactory.

'Queer things have been happening lately,' he said, when we were rushing at full speed along the departmental road. 'The man fished from the river was not

drowned. Dr. Maupert says he died of consumption. And the other man was dead when the train passed over him. Anyway, neither is Lafontaine or Lastolle.'

Bannister looked at us with a strange, tense expression. 'Would they be the Americans I'm searching for, do you think, Chief?'

'I can't tell yet, but I've left a note for Dufresne. He'll compare the photographs you gave him with the measurements and indications obtained by Dr. Maupert.'

The day was well advanced when at last our car swerved from the road and bumped to a halt on the fringe of a pine forest. Lastolle's coupé stood in a small clearing not far from a winding path which dwindled and lost itself among the trees. The front wheels were partly burnt and the mudguards and bonnet twisted as from a terrific impact. The furrows the wheels had cut in the soil especially appeared to interest M. Bertillon, and he crawled about on hands and knees, peering at the marks between them with his lenses. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of delight, and I saw that he had found a dirty glove which had been half-hidden in the ground. As he lifted it, a crumpled scrap of paper fell to the ground. This he smoothed out on his knees, and we all bent eagerly forward to inspect the find.

'Chundah Lal. Enclos des Lilas,' Bertillon read. 'An address, evidently, and written hurriedly in pencil. "Chundah Lal" — now what can that be? Sounds like an Indian name. Well, we'll see if there is such a place as the "Enclos des Lilas." This car was driven purposely against a tree. Then it was wheeled here by three people. See how deeply their toes have marked on each side and behind. They were putting their weight forward and straining with all the strength of their legs.

We'll take plaster casts of these footprints. One wore elegant pointed shoes; the others had big heavy boots with nails in them. The ignition was switched off — proof that the engine was not running. No signs of a struggle, but a bullet hole in the dashboard, fired from above and behind the driver. These men intended to burn the car, but bungled it somehow. According to the police, Lastolle had discharged his chauffeur a week before, so he was probably driving. If those pointed shoes belonged to Lastolle, then he helped the other two to wreck and set fire to his car. But, of course, Pointed Toes may have been one of the gang who murdered the banker. Now let us go to the garage and see the haunted taxi. Afterwards we will inquire about the man with the Hindoo name.'

The garage proprietor conducted us with evident reluctance to where the mysterious vehicle stood in a shed by itself. The front mudguard was bent and the bonnet had been torn off.

'That was how it was found,' the man informed us. 'It was a nice coupé, and often hired by people who had business calls to make. Now that four people have been murdered in it, no one will ever drive it again. It is bewitched.'

'What was the name of the first chauffeur?' Bertillon asked.

'He was a Parisian named Raolle. He had been chauffeur in a foreign gentleman's house. An Oriental, I believe. There was some trouble over religion, but he came to me with excellent references. The car was in a fair way of becoming his own when he disappeared, poor chap.'

'How do you mean? Was he buying it?'

'Yes, it's a rule of mine with all my drivers — a kind

of insurance. So much daily is deducted from their earnings, to which I add a fifth, and when a certain amount is reached, the cab belongs to them, and they set up on their own. It ensures good service, too, for if they leave me they lose what they've paid.'

'So this Raolle would lose several thousand francs by going? I see,' Bertillon commented thoughtfully. 'Have you by any chance the name of his former employers?'

The taxi-owner pulled out an account-book from a shelf and turned the leaves rapidly.

'Here you are, sir. A Madame Dolores d'Annecy, 43, rue du Trocadero, Passy. H-m-m. I was mistaken about the Oriental. Now where did I get that idea?' — and the man closed his eyes and drummed on the desk. Suddenly he turned to M. Bertillon. 'Of course. The second poor fellow who disappeared a month ago whilst driving the same car, had worked for an Oriental, a M. Chundah Lal ——' Bertillon turned angrily at my involuntary exclamation. 'Do you know the name?' he queried stonily. I hastily disavowed all knowledge of Hindoos in general. Fortunately, the old garage proprietor had turned to his book again. 'Chundah Lal — that's it, sir,' he cried, 'and he lives at Versailles. Enclos des Lilas.'

This time we were all prepared for the startling news, and our faces were coldly indifferent.

'Tell me, sir,' Bertillon continued, 'if all your drivers died or disappeared when a tidy sum has been amassed by your private insurance system, you'd make a good thing out of it, eh?'

The old fellow threw up his hands in horror. 'I — Heaven forbid, sir! Whatever has been paid is divided amongst the others.'

He shivered at the meaning behind my chief's words.

'You're making a terrible suggestion. Besides, what about the passengers?'

'Ah, yes; I was coming to that. Who were they?'

'I don't know. My men are quite independent and make their own arrangements. They pay me according to the mileage on the speedometer. Yet I did see the man who hired the car the night the second driver vanished, but I don't know his name.'

Bertillon showed him several photographs, among which was that of Lafontaine. The proprietor at once picked it out.

'That is the man!' he cried shrilly; 'although he was dressed differently.'

Our examination of the car, from which four men had so mysteriously disappeared, was without result. But a month had passed since the last tragedy, and this was only to be expected. Bertillon was singularly thoughtful on our journey back to headquarters. For a time he paced restlessly up and down his office, whilst we stood and discussed the case in subdued tones. At last he came over to me and said, 'You and M. Bannister had better go to the Enclos des Lilas at Versailles, and Rousseau shall make inquiries about this Madame d'Annecy. That sounds like an assumed name. Report to me tomorrow. Yes ——' as a knock sounded on the door. A gendarme came in with a note.

'This is from Dr. Maupert,' Bertillon said, when he had scanned it. 'Both those bodies he is at work on show extreme emaciation. He believes that if they did not actually die of starvation, they had at any rate eaten no solid food for days. Tonnerre! This is getting to be queer. I must sit down and think it out. Send my secretary to me with my private records of the last twenty years. Now get along; I wish to remain undisturbed.'

I suggested to Bannister that we should go to Versailles first and then call at Passy on our way back.

The Enclos des Lilas was a stately country mansion standing in a spacious park on the outskirts of the little historical town. The difficulty was how to gain admittance without arousing suspicion. The local brigadier of gendarmes informed us that the owner of the house was seldom there. He had the reputation of being a learned man, and was noted for his generosity. When I suggested a visit as a government official, the brigadier shook his head doubtfully.

'We should not like to offend him. The Sûreté cannot possibly have any reasons for annoying M. Chundah Lal. There must be some mistake.'

I saw that we should get little help from the local authorities, but the mention of charities gave me an idea. Much as I hated it, some kind of disguise was necessary. Bannister, of course, hailed my suggestion with delight, and we returned in all haste to his office in the rue Scribe, where we transformed ourselves into passable clergymen. Some visiting-cards were quickly printed on his efficient little hand-press, and thus equipped we rang the huge gong at the gates of the Enclos des Lilas. A servant, whose face appeared the darker for his white linen turban and clothes, admitted us with a courteous wave of the hand. I stated that I desired to speak to M. Chundah Lal, whereat he raised his eyebrows and replied that his excellency only received visitors by appointment, but since we had obviously come some distance, the secretary could perhaps spare a few minutes. I gave the man my card and followed on his heels to the house. Wealth and good taste were apparent in every detail, and I foresaw that our task was going to be difficult. This feeling was increased when after a very few moments a young,

elegantly dressed Hindoo servant entered silently and said with a bow that his excellency consented to receive us. So we had our first glimpse of that strange and fantastic being, Chundah Lal, whose personality exhaled an air of dignity and mystery such as I have encountered in no other man. At the outset I saw only his eyes — large, luminous, and masterful; indeed, the face and figure seemed but an inadequate frame to these eyes. Under their gaze I had the feeling that not only our object but our very souls were laid bare. When the silence bade fair to become oppressive, the Hindoo, who had risen at our entry, spoke in a deep, sonorous voice in perfect English:

'You purport to be English clergy, I perceive, gentlemen,' and he smiled a slow, ironical smile. 'May I ask if you have been — ahem! — ordained — many hours?'

I tried my utmost to meet his mocking gaze. I am not easily embarrassed, and hardened myself with the thought that, after all, this venerable Oriental was probably only a criminal, but the effort proved unavailing. Under the compelling magnetism of those eyes I felt helpless.

'Why, of course,' Bannister interposed, with an attempt at dignity, 'I don't quite understand your question.'

'Don't you? Then let me put it plainly. Why do you wear spectacles that fit too tightly, but which, nevertheless, have not marked your nose? Why, furthermore, do *you*, who are obviously American, pretend to be English? And how is it, since this card has an English address, that the ink is still so fresh that it has smudged and stained my fingers? Come, suppose you drop all this and tell me what you want. What are you — crooks, or police?'

The sight of Bannister's face at this cool question was the last straw. I could not help it; I burst into a roar of laughter, in which my friend joined.

Chundah Lal smiled broadly. 'That's better. You are not crooks, or you would not laugh. Now, what have I done to deserve the visit of detectives?'

It was useless to fence after this, so I explained quite simply that we had found his name and address in a car which had been abandoned, and that we wished to ask a few questions regarding his former chauffeur.

The Hindoo listened gravely, but when I had finished he shook his head and said:

'I am afraid I cannot help you. Many people who are strangers to me have my address, for I have some reputation as a seer. As for the chauffeur, I know nothing about him. He served me for a year, but he would not conform to our ways, so I discharged him.'

We rose and were about to go, when the secretary entered hurriedly and said something in a language we did not understand, at the same time holding out a telegram. With a curt word of apology, Chundah Lal tore it open. For a second his calm deserted him. I saw that his hand trembled and his face twitched. Then he was cool and collected again. A wave of his slim hand dismissed us, and, bowing, we accompanied the servant to the gates. Once outside, Bannister seized my arm. 'Quick, let's get to a telephone. Ask Dufresne to send an inspector to the Western Union cable office in the rue Scribe. That was a cablegram from America. Time 4.45, addressed to the Enclos des Lilas. Tell him to get a duplicate. He's a deep one, that Indian — but he lost his balance just for a second.'

When we reached headquarters, a copy had already arrived. It was in cypher, but, since the message was

long, we succeeded in decoding it only after some difficulty. The language was Italian, and the text was vague and carefully worded, but such as it was, we realised that Chundah Lal was not the benign if sharp-witted patriarch he appeared.

Terrible news [it ran]. Number Seventeen has broken harness and taken ship to Europe. Too late to stop him. Act on his arrival — S.S. Bordeaux — will arrive Cherbourg nineteenth.

The sender's name was 'Mario Silvano,' and the cable had been handed in at Boston, Massachusetts.

The next day we held a consultation in Bertillon's office, at which Colbert and Dufresne were present. Rousseau had not returned from his investigation at Passy, but orders had been given that he was to come up as soon as he arrived.

'It has been definitely established,' Bertillon said, addressing Bannister, 'that the man who hired the fatal taxi — 469-Y-29 — on the night it was discovered for the first time on the road to Le Havre, was Calder, your Wall Street broker. The blood-stains and the disappearance of passenger and chauffeur seem to point to a crime. I am afraid we can give little hope to Miss O'Connor, for the second time this same car was found under similar conditions it had been hired by Étienne Lafontaine. As you know, he and the driver Codorin have also vanished completely. Some devilish organisation for systematic and wholesale murder is behind all this, and I believe that Lastolle the banker is another of their victims. Curiously enough, they seem to choose only men who are in trouble and tired of life. How they get rid of the bodies remains a mystery.

'It is probable that Hellor, the film actor you are

seeking, has also met with foul play at the hands of the same gang. He was seen several times at Armenonville with this Dolores d'Annecy. Perhaps she is their decoy. The moment we had your message yesterday, all conversations from Chundah Lal's telephone were taken down. Soon after you left, someone called up Passy and informed Madame d'Annecy of the cable from America. They spoke in English — so we got it all right. The speaker concluded by saying, "Look out for two inquisitive strangers," and an accurate description of both of you was given. We must also remember that one of the chauffeurs who vanished after driving the mysterious taxi had worked for Madame d'Annecy, the other had been employed by the Indian. Whether they are accomplices or not, I cannot tell yet. I have men watching at Versailles and Passy. To-morrow is the nineteenth mentioned in their cable, so you had better go to Cherbourg to meet the boat. Keep well hidden, and dress as porters or stevedores. Emissaries of the Hindoo will certainly be there, and you will thus discover who the passenger is the cable warned them against. Ah — here is Rousseau. Well, Brigadier, what news?'

The old fellow — excellently disguised as a loafer — had entered on Bertillon's words.

'It was impossible to get into the house, monsieur,' he said, 'but I saw enough to make me realise that we are dealing with a strange household. She is a beautiful woman, this Madame Dolores. A kind of Carmen — dark and mysterious. I had taken up a post near the gates at first. But I discovered a second entrance in a small alley at the back. Some queer customers drifted in and out whilst I was there. They were dressed as servants and tradesmen, and for a time I was fooled;

but when I saw the chauffeur, I perceived that this was only a blind. Although he wore an elegant livery, and had shaved off moustache and beard, there was no mistaking his six-foot-four of misshapen bone and sinew. It was Sergeant Cleremont.'

'What! The man who was nearly murdered by his wife a year ago, and disappeared soon after?' Dufresne cried in surprise.

'Yes; I recognised him at once. He shot the two apaches his wife had hired, if you remember. The courts acquitted him, and he thereupon began to haunt the taverns of the underworld in search of the treacherous woman. Then suddenly he vanished completely. Now he is chauffeur to that Madame d'Annecy.'

'Very well, return to Passy and follow her wherever she goes. Be careful. They are clever people.'

Long before the boat was due, Bannister, Colbert, and I were trundling barrels and cases of merchandise along the busy quayside. We had not only dressed for the part, but grime and artificial tan had so transformed our faces that we felt fairly safe. We saw no one resembling the people we were after until the gangway had been lowered; then I perceived the secretary who had received us at Versailles; he was standing with several surly-looking ruffians near the customs barrier. It was well we had been cautious, for two of the men were posted with their backs to the Hindoo, watching the crowd behind him. The secretary lingered until long after the last passenger had disappeared and his face wore a perplexed and disappointed expression. Finally, when the ship began to warp to her berth, where the derricks were waiting to unload her, he clambered into a waiting car, followed by three of his men. The others had evidently received orders to remain in Cherbourg.

Colbert elected to keep them under observation whilst we shadowed the secretary. Something had miscarried, for he drove straight to the big house in Versailles, and soon after a telephone message to Passy was intercepted. It was short and purposely vague:

'Not on board unless stowaway. Three agents on duty near the ship.'

Two days passed now in tedious watching and waiting. Any hasty action would only result in failure, since we had no tangible evidence against anyone. I was in the midst of a discussion with M. Bertillon when a knock came on the door and Bannister entered, followed by Miss O'Connor. Something unexpected had happened, for the girl was trembling with suppressed excitement and her eyes sparkled.

'I've had a letter from my sweetheart!' she cried shrilly, waving a sheet of paper. 'A letter — and what's more, the Crédit Lyonnais telephoned this morning requesting me to call at their head office. Two cheques were presented yesterday signed by Étienne. One was for ten and the other for fifty thousand francs. The manager, who is a friend of the family, stopped payment until he had spoken with me. He says that the signature is undoubtedly that of M. Lafontaine, and since there is no actual proof that he is dead, he will have to pay.'

My chief stared blankly; I saw how much such an unforeseen event startled him. 'Sit down, mademoiselle,' he said quietly, 'and let me see that letter. I hope you have brought others for comparison? Good, you have. Just a moment, please. I am going to ask the manager to send me those cheques at once,' and he gave an order over the telephone. 'Now what does the letter say? H-m-m, no address. Ordinary cheap notepaper, commercial ink. Postmark, rue Sainte-Anne, that's in

the avenue de l'Opéra.' He quickly scanned the missive. 'Very vague, isn't it? There are reasons why he had to disappear suddenly; he is now in Paris but dare not come openly. You are to meet him to-night at the embankment near the Alexander Bridge. Strange! Please leave these letters, mademoiselle, and come back this afternoon.'

'Oh, but M. Bertillon, how coldly you say that! I am so happy — so happy. I am sure Étienne is alive and well, don't you think so too?'

'I cannot say as yet — but you will know to-night. The appointment is for ten o'clock; you must keep it and we shall be near to protect you.'

'To protect me! From my beloved Étienne?'

'Well, if it *is* the young man, there will be no need. But please do not be too hopeful. You see, this letter may have been written some time ago, and the cheques also. Only in our laboratory can we make sure of that. Not a word to anyone. M. Bannister will accompany you and stay with you until this afternoon.'

The poor girl looked from one to the other of us in mute appeal, but we all shared Bertillon's apprehension. The sight of her wistful, tear-filled eyes went to my heart, but it was better to prepare her for the worst. I thought with a shudder of the blood-stained taxi and the alert and mocking face of the Hindoo. Bannister rose and escorted her to the door. He turned at the threshold and looked a question at Bertillon.

'Stay with mademoiselle until nine and try to keep her from dwelling too much on this business. Then bring her here in a closed car.'

Shortly after they had gone, an employee arrived from the bank.

'I have come at the manager's request, sir, because

I formerly cashed many of M. Lafontaine's cheques. These are certainly genuine. I know his signature.'

Bertillon examined the cheques. 'I see one is made payable to a James Fradell and was handed in to your London branch four days ago. Did you make inquiries about this Fradell?'

'Oh, yes, we have telegraphed; no doubt we shall have a reply to-morrow.'

Bertillon requested the man to wait, and beckoned to me to accompany him to the laboratory. Our instruments failed, however, to disclose any of the usual traces of forgery. Bertillon looked puzzled.

'These cheques and the letter are an unexpected move. Probably the Oriental heard of the large sums standing to Lafontaine's credit, but he must be a clever penman.'

'What does the appointment with Miss O'Connor signify, do you think, sir?' I asked.

'They may intend to abduct her and then force her to write to her family as though she were with Lafontaine.'

'But,' I objected, 'isn't it just possible that he *is* alive? That he was a prisoner and escaped. He may be the unknown referred to in that cable.'

'Then why does he not at once communicate with us; present himself in person at the bank and appear openly to aid us in capturing those who kidnapped him? Anyway, that point is soon settled. If this letter was written a month ago, the chemical tests I am about to apply will show the ink to be old.'

I watched breathlessly whilst my chief manipulated acids and microscope. Suddenly he thumped the table with rage. 'Devil take it! The ink is quite fresh. Well, report at nine. I am going to prepare a trap which I hope will catch our quarry to-night.'

We assembled at the Alexander Bridge in good time and concealed ourselves in closed cars, which crossed and recrossed in order to avoid attracting attention. My heart beat fast as ten o'clock approached. Detectives and police were hidden at each end of the bridge and cycle police guarded the streets leading to it. The night was wet and boisterous and the few pedestrians hurrying by paid no attention to us. As the hour chimed from a church across the river, we alighted and walked quickly to a stone lion on the corner, before which Miss O'Connor was already pacing up and down. I knew that Bannister was hidden somewhere near, but I could not see him. Suddenly Bertillon gripped my arm and pulled me into the shadows. A tall figure had appeared abruptly beside the girl. We were close enough to hear the cry she gave, and saw her throw her arms around the man with a gesture of joy. Bertillon's breath hissed sharply and he sprang forward, just as Bannister emerged from a recess and grasped the unknown by the shoulder. At his touch the man twisted round with animal swiftness and made as though to escape, but we had now closed round.

'It's Étienne — Étienne!' the girl sobbed wildly. 'Oh, monsieur, I knew he was alive — my dear one.'

Bertillon pointed to the police car.

'You will please both come to headquarters,' he said sharply. 'I am glad, for the young lady's sake, that you are not dead, monsieur, but we shall want an explanation from you. Come, my car will hold five.'

Not a word more was spoken by any of us until we reached the quai des Orfévres.

'Now,' said my chief when we were all in his office, 'kindly tell us why you suddenly disappeared a month ago, monsieur. Begin where you like, but remember we

know your movements up to the evening when you hired taxi number 460-Y-29.'

At the words, Étienne sprang up, a look of fear on his handsome face. As I now saw him, a tall, muscular man of thirty or thereabouts, he struck me as singularly likeable. His brilliant black eyes scanned our faces for a moment as though seeking an ally, then his expression hardened ominously.

'I can tell you nothing, gentlemen. I have already broken my word by returning to Paris. I cannot honourably go a step further.'

'As you like,' Bertillon answered coldly. 'But then you will be detained until the mystery of the blood-stained taxi is cleared up — and until we know what has become of all the other men.'

'Blood-stained taxi!' Lafontaine cried sharply. 'I know nothing about that. I never was in this car which you have already twice mentioned.'

'Let me refresh your memory, then. You have just returned from Boston on the S.S. Bordeaux, and your arrival was known to Chundah Lal and Madame d'Annecy.'

'Good Heavens! You know about them already?' the man exclaimed. Bertillon nodded. 'By now they and their band are arrested. You see, for your own sake and Miss O'Connor's, you had better be frank.'

Lafontaine gazed wildly around. 'How did you find out about the Euthanasian Society?'

Bannister whistled. 'Euthanasia, eh? The happy death! So that's what has become of my American friends!'

'No, no — you are quite mistaken. That is merely a name. Those men are all alive, just as I am.'

'Come, come, sir,' Bertillon interposed. 'You are only

making matters worse for yourself and these people. You cannot be accused of betraying them. Sooner or later we should know the whole truth, anyhow. Again I entreat you, for Miss O'Connor's sake, to avoid the scandal of your arrest on a capital charge. Better tell us what happened.'

For a long time Lafontaine sat with his head in his hands, whilst his sweetheart held him close and whispered to him. At last he roused himself and said:

'Very well — I will do as you say, Marcelle. Since M. Bertillon assures me that they would have been arrested even had I not returned, I may even be helping these wonderful, kindly people instead of harming them. Such an enterprise as theirs could not last, anyhow. It is too big and noble. Perhaps you will not believe my story. Marcelle has told you why we quarrelled. What with that and the loss, as I then thought, of all my money, I was utterly wretched. I made up my mind to kill myself. It was whilst I was having my last fling in sheer despair that the Hindoo Chundah Lal came and sat beside me. He is a marvellous old man. How he managed it I don't rightly recall, but somehow I felt I had to tell him all my troubles. In a short time he knew all about me. At his suggestion I followed him to his car; I didn't want to a bit at first, but there was no resisting his soft, purring voice. He took me to his house, but I have no idea where it is. We drank some wine and he again asked if I had truly decided to die. I replied that I was quite determined, and he thereupon related that he was the head of an organisation called the Euthanasia. The dream of his life was to give men who were failures, or who were in great trouble and tired of life, a fresh start. I cannot hope to convey the impression his soft voice and inspired manner made on

me, but that night it seemed like a perfect dream come true. A fresh start — with a new name — in a distant country, and all the past wiped out and forgotten. Yes, forgotten, he said. All I needed to do was to swear on my honour never to seek to return to my former personality, even if — as sometimes happened — memories of it floated across my mind. In time these would disappear. He guaranteed that I should receive letters which would procure work for me at once. I should practically die and be reborn. I was to hand him what little money I still possessed and place myself unreservedly in his hands. I consented. I remember I slept in his house that night and the next day drew my ready money from the bank. One of his men accompanied me. Once I had consented and taken the oath, there was no drawing back. In fact, I was warned that I should be killed if I attempted to betray them. Well, I didn't try. The thought of forgetting the past — you see, I loved Marcelle more than life — and starting again with a clean slate and no memories, seemed marvellous. I had often thought that many of us, when in great trouble, would give all they possessed for such a possibility. I returned to the house in a closed car with drawn blinds. Then — let me see — then — I dined with the Hindoo and a very beautiful woman. There were several other people present also — all kindly, benevolent, sympathetic. We drank much wine, and at the conclusion of the dinner I sat down in a chair opposite the old man they called Master and Excellency. His eyes burned into mine. I felt sleepy, everything seemed to become a dream, a pleasant dream, in which I was constantly moving, driving, floating. Once, after an accident, I had an injection of heroin. Well, it was like that, only more fantastic. Finally, things cleared a

little. I heard the slop-slop of water and felt the swing and swoop of a ship. I smelt the salt tang of the ocean. And then abruptly I realised that my dream was a reality; I was truly on a vessel at sea. I had that terrible feeling one sometimes has on the instant of waking from deep sleep. I could neither remember who I was nor where I was. For a long time I went feverishly through the trunk in my cabin, examined my clothes, read my papers, and looked at myself in the mirror. Little by little I grew calm; I was Jules Vernier — French-Canadian, born in Montreal. An inward voice seemed to be telling me all these things. I had been away — and very ill, and was now returning. It must sound incredible, I know; it does to me now. Yet somehow I never doubted the evidence of the documents and letters of introduction in my pocket. There were times when I was on the eve of remembering something, but I could not even think what it was I wished to remember. So I arrived and called on the man for whom I had a letter in Quebec. He gave me a job. It was during the second week after I had started work — he was an importer of French goods — that I read in a French paper of the disappearance of Étienne Lafontaine, and how the shares he thought worthless had suddenly soared to an incredible price — and like a flash of lightning on a dark night my past returned. I knew who I was and remembered what had happened. The Hindoo had kept his word. He had given me a fresh start and, but for a freak of chance, I should have, little by little, settled down as Jules Vernier. How it was done I cannot say. Some Eastern drug and hypnotism, or magic, perhaps. Even now the days which elapsed between that dinner and my awakening on board ship are but fragments of a strange dream. So strong was the spell that for a

long time after the first shock of recovering my memory was past, my two personalities overlapped. There were moments when I felt convinced I was truly Vernier and that I was suffering from delusions and only imagined I had once been Lafontaine. When this happened, I thought of my sweet Marcelle. Her image and my love finally triumphed. However, it was one thing to desire a return to the past and quite another to put it into practice. I had but little money and no papers except those of Jules Vernier; and I was watched. Not openly; but I had a feeling that agents of this Euthanasia organisation were keeping me constantly under observation. Someone watched me at my lodging-house, at work, and even in cafés and restaurants. I recalled what Chundah Lal had said.

'"Those who break faith with us — should the past ever rise from the shadows of memory — die.' Now that I was rich and could marry my Marcelle, I had no wish to die. I had tasted the Oriental's uncanny power and grew afraid. For days I tortured my brain with the puzzle how to obtain the money I needed. Then I remembered a good friend of mine in London. We had been at school together, and had made a boyish vow to help each other if ever need arose. There was even a nickname which we had agreed upon for just such an emergency. I sent him an urgent cable asking for five thousand francs. Twelve hours later I received the money in the name of Vernier. My journey from Canada to New York was uneventful. But I had a shock when I arrived there. Two dark, foreign men spoke to me as I left the station, and asked me if I was Jules Vernier. I could not shake them off. Then I hit on the plan of disguising myself as a woman. Instead of taking a boat in New York, I went to Boston. I left

the ship in Cherbourg, still dressed as an old woman. I saw the men who were watching for me, and realised they would not hesitate to kill me. After all, they had faithfully carried out their share, and their risks must be great. I decided to meet Marcelle secretly and fly with her to England, and so you caught me. Thank God, it was not Chundah Lal.'

For a long time after Lafontaine had concluded his strange tale, we remained silent. Scepticism struggled with the slowly growing conviction that what we had heard was true. I remembered our visit to Versailles and the uncanny eyes of the Indian. Suddenly Bertillon turned to Dufresne.

'Call your men off at once; I hope it is not too late. We must not arrest anyone yet. Set a watch, but, whatever you do, avoid alarming these people. It's our only hope of finding out what has become of those others. God knows under what names and in what part of the world they are. That is what has happened to your Americans, M. Bannister,' he added, as Dufresne dashed away.

'Calder had appropriated his client's money and Hellor had become entangled with a woman. And there is Cottin, the jeweller. They all had their fresh start. That blood-stained taxi was faked to make us believe the passengers and drivers had been murdered. Lebrun informed me to-day that it is not human blood. It explains Lastolle's wrecked car also. He is another of their victims. What a scheme! What a diabolical scheme! Think what it means to men who are in trouble to be offered a clean slate and a fresh start. Such men are not likely to complain, even if their memory should return. Take our friend here. One hundred thousand francs he paid over — and in exchange? Forged papers,

some clothes — a bit of hypnotism and his fare. Fine profits, eh? They must have agents all over the world. The organisation has been flourishing for years, and fortunately they have become careless, but I don't see yet what the law can do. Judges and jury would laugh at us. Furthermore, their victims consent and they receive what they bargain for ——' Here Bertillon thumped the table angrily. 'Philanthropy, indeed! Fortunately some, like the banker, were wanted on a warrant, so our Hindoo friend is conspiring to defeat the ends of justice. That's about the only charge we can bring.'

'By Jove,' Étienne Lafontaine interposed, 'I had never thought of it like that. You mean they are crooks? That fine story of helping unfortunates ——?'

Bertillon smiled grimly. 'Be sure they pick only those who can pay well. They had in some cases to obtain bodies so that we should believe the missing man to be dead. Probably that consumptive died in some hovel and they bought his remains. He was to take your place, M. Lafontaine. Rather crude that last — but criminals always underrate our intelligence. By the way, did you send two cheques to your friend in London?'

'No, monsieur, only one — ten thousand francs.'

My chief placed the two cheques the bank had sent before Lafontaine. 'Then whence comes this one for fifty thousand, cashed by a Paris firm?'

The young man examined it perplexedly. 'I cannot say. It is my signature, but unless I signed it whilst unconscious I cannot explain it.'

Bertillon nodded. 'Probably you did. They knew you had money, and cashed this when they received news of your return. It is the first time in all my experience that hypnotism has been put to practical use.'

The door opened, and Dufresne entered, flushed and breathless.

'Just in time. Colbert was about to raid both houses. What do you intend to do now?'

Bertillon looked at the girl, who, until then, had remained silent.

'Take him to London at once, Miss O'Connor. He is in grave danger in France. Get married quietly and spend your honeymoon in England. It is only a matter of weeks before we capture this gang, I'll promise you that. Until you go, two detectives shall constantly guard you. I'll wish you good-night now, we have much to do.'

By morning telephone and telegraph had spread a net around France, through which it would be hard for the Euthanasia Association to break. Every railway line and every harbour was watched and foreign police headquarters were warned to coöperate. We sought our beds at last tired out, but for me sleep was long in coming. I knew that soon we should have to prepare for a duel to the death with clever and ruthless criminals of a type I had never as yet encountered. When we gathered again in Bertillon's office the next evening, I had the satisfaction of knowing that Étienne Lafontaine and his pretty betrothed had arrived safely in England and would henceforth be protected from harm by our British colleagues.

EPISODE IX

THE PASSING OF THE EUTHANASIA

'You will be busy to-day, sir,' my concierge said to me with an ingratiating smile as I picked up my morning paper from his table on my way out. 'That seems to be a queer accident in the rue de Nevers. A messenger from the Sûreté came with this note for you five minutes ago. He said it was urgent. I was about to bring it upstairs when I saw you in the hall.'

'Accident?' I queried. 'I have heard nothing. You know more than I do,' and I opened the envelope. It was from M. Bertillon, requesting my immediate presence. I ran into the street and hailed a passing taxi. During the short drive to the quai des Orfévres, I had just time to glance at the 'Journal.'

'Another Motor Mystery,' I saw in large headlines on the first page; but the report was vague and had evidently come in at the last minute. A private car had been found, terribly smashed, in the rue de Nevers near our headquarters. It had collided with an electric-light standard, and under the front wheels were the remains of a cycle. The driver had been shot and the interior of the car was soaked in blood. The article ended with the usual formula in such cases: The police are investigating and several arrests are expected shortly!

I found Inspector Louys waiting for me on the stairs. 'Come along,' he cried, 'the chief is already at the scene of the smash. He wants you to bring a camera and panoramic lenses. A lorry will remove the car when it has been photographed. The crowd is being held in check by gendarmes.'

'Is it anything special, then?' I asked over my shoulder, running up to the laboratory.

'Yes,' he yelled. 'You'll see. I've a car waiting.'

The rue de Nevers is a dirty, narrow street near the embankment, not ten minutes distant from the Sûreté. A huge crowd had, of course, collected, but the police had stretched ropes across each end and every doorway was guarded to prevent the inmates from approaching the spot of the tragedy, which was at the corner near the river. The car had struck the iron standard with terrific force and was completely wrecked. M. Bertillon was examining the rear of the vehicle when I arrived and one of his assistants was testing the doors for finger-prints. As soon as I had taken a series of photographs from various angles, a tackle was rigged and the limousine hauled up an inclined plane of planks to the police lorry, which at once drove to the spacious court of the Conciergerie. The huge gates were then shut, so that we could continue our examination without interference.

The interior, beautifully upholstered in cream satin, made it obvious that the car had belonged to a woman; but seats and floor were stained with large crimson patches and gouts of blood had coagulated on the off window.

'The driver, a man about forty, has been taken to the infirmary,' Bertillon said to me. 'He has a nasty scalp wound, but nothing very serious. He was found lying on the floor of the car. It's an inside drive, as you perceive. Beside him I found the most curious object I have ever seen. Come up to the laboratory with me; I am going to examine it. I'll wager I shall surprise you.'

There was such a note of suppressed excitement in my

chief's manner that my nerves tingled in anticipation. Lebrun met us at the door with a mysterious smile.

'I have rigged up a battery, monsieur,' he said in his soft, emotionless voice. 'You can obtain from two to twenty volts by moving a lever.'

'Good,' said M. Bertillon. 'I've got several test-tubes with blood for you to examine.'

'Microscopically?' Lebrun queried.

'No, I don't need you for that. Biologically. The driver of the car swears that the blood on the seats is his own; I don't believe it. That wound on his head never bled enough to leave all those stains. I want you to apply our new coagulation test. We may be lucky. The surgeon from the infirmary will send you some of the driver's blood. It will be the first chance we've had to try our new method,' Bertillon added, turning to me.

I knew to what he was referring. Quite recently we had discovered that the blood of certain human beings reacted in a peculiar manner when mixed with that of others. The injected blood caused it to clot in parts. So violent was this phenomenon in some cases that, before transfusion was now resorted to in hospitals, a test was made to ascertain whether the blood to be given was not antagonistic to the patient. Nevertheless, it was one chance in a thousand that this discovery would help us to prove that the blood in the car was not that of the driver. Bertillon noticed my dubious expression.

'I believe in never rejecting a possible chance,' he said violently. 'See what you think of this, but prepare yourself for a shock.'

On the words he pulled a small package from his pocket and unwrapped it. I saw that it contained a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles with very large round lenses and a peculiar narrow bulge in the centre above

the bridge. From this dangled a fine insulated wire. I had expected something quite different. Without giving me time to express my disappointment, Bertillon walked to the window and released the sliding shutter which transformed the laboratory into a dark-room. Then, switching on the ruby lamp in the ceiling, he turned his back to me and manipulated the battery Lebrun had placed on the table. Abruptly, with a muttered exclamation, Bertillon turned — and I yelled in surprise and terror. He had adjusted the mysterious spectacles and was glaring at me with eyes that were like the wildest fantasy of a nightmare. Not only did they appear monstrous in size, but they shone — phosphorescent and hypnotic — like those of a feline. For a moment I stared — motionless — unable to realise what had happened. Then understanding came.

'Chundah Lal!' I cried. 'Those glasses belonged to him. Now I understand why his eyes were so piercing and luminous.'

Bertillon picked up a mirror and surveyed his appearance complacently.

'Hein? The criminal brain is a queer thing, and the mind of this Hindoo the strangest we've encountered. Who but an Oriental would have thought of such a devilish contrivance? I'll undertake to hypnotise any of my inspectors in less than ten minutes with these glasses — even Rousseau,' and he chuckled boyishly. 'Switch on the lights.'

I obeyed at once, and we examined the uncanny apparatus. The lenses were so made that they enlarged the eye without distorting the sight, and between them, cunningly adjusted, was a tiny electric bulb that needed only the current of a pocket-lamp. It was silvered except for two minute pinholes which directed the light

obliquely into the pupil of each eye in such fashion that the entire eye shone as with an inward flame. We were still absorbed by our discovery when there came a loud pounding on the door, which I had locked.

'Monsieur — monsieur!' we heard Rousseau shouting excitedly. 'Quick! A most amazing find.'

I slipped back the bolt and Inspector Rousseau came stumbling in. With a dramatic gesture he opened a bundle he was carrying and scattered a heap of coins, gold ornaments, and flashing jewels among the retorts and crucibles on the table.

'A dummy petrol tank,' he gasped, 'and it's full of loot.'

'What!' Bertillon yelled. 'And you smashed it!'

'No, no, sir. One end unscrews. I've taken care to disturb nothing, and any finger-marks on it are still intact.'

For a time Bertillon walked up and down in deep thought.

'Thank Heaven! We have picked up the trail of this Euthanasia again,' he said at last. 'I was beginning to despair. Since that night Étienne Lafontaine came back, and I called off the police in order to make it possible to trace the poor fellows who have been scattered about the world, deprived of their memory and lost to their relatives, this devilish Hindoo and his band have vanished as by magic. I feel sure they have not left France, for every road, railway, and harbour is watched day and night. But France is a big country. Thanks to this car and the driver, we are in touch again. I imagine Chundah Lal was trying to get away with his valuables when something happened. Go and help Lebrun,' he said to me. 'Rousseau and I will continue our examination of the car.'

Everything on that morning appeared to be working in our favour. Lebrun had succeeded in liquefying some of the blood and had just received a tube from the infirmary.

'You have come opportunely,' he exclaimed when I entered. 'Bare your left arm. I prefer to tap *your* veins; you have more to spare than I have.'

I watched him manipulate his instruments with little hope of a happy result, but hardly had he added some of the blood taken from my arm to that of the wounded driver's, when he sprang up with a cry of delight.

'The reaction! Dr. Kleinmann's reaction! The chauffeur's blood clots — look! And that taken from the car doesn't. Someone else was wounded besides the driver.'

The Kleinmann reaction was so distinct that I immediately carried a report to my chief, who was still in the courtyard of the Conciergerie with Rousseau and Louys.

'The lucky series,' he said with a satisfied smile. 'We shall succeed now; I feel sure of it. Come along; I've finished here. Do you know who the man is who was found in the car? Dauvergne, the racing driver who killed his sweetheart five years ago and escaped from the gendarmes whilst being transferred to La Rochelle. He disappeared in the most extraordinary manner. Chundah Lal again. Here is Dauvergne's police chart. But for the anthropometrical measurements and finger-prints I should never have known him. It now remains to be seen whether he remembers who he is.'

A surgeon was bandaging the man's wound when we arrived at the infirmary. Dufresne had joined us, and with the doctor's consent at once began his questions.

'Well, Charles Dauvergne, so you have decided to

come back to us? Who did you murder this time? You know you have still five years to serve for killing your sweetheart, Mademoiselle Lilliane.'

The man looked at Dufresne with dilated eyes.

'My name is not Dauvergne. I am Jules Poisson, and I was alone in the car. I've not killed anybody.'

For a moment the Sûreté chief stared at the fellow suspiciously; then without a word he placed the picture of a handsome girl — the unfortunate Lilliane — on the bed. The man started visibly and his face twitched. For a long time he gazed in silence at the photograph. Suddenly the blood suffused his face and as quickly receded, leaving him pale as death. His hands began to tremble and, as we watched, his expression changed, as though another personality were creeping furtively into a body to which it had been long a stranger. Tears started from his eyes, and abruptly, with a wild cry, he covered his face and began to sob. Dufresne gave him time to recover from his emotion and then, in a kindly voice, urged him to tell the truth. So, little by little, in disjointed sentences, broken ever and again by choking sobs, he related his story. It was in all respects similar to that of Lafontaine. Pursued by the police and obsessed by the desire to forget, he had met the Hindoo in a café in Paris, where only criminals foregathered. Chundah Lal had promised him immunity from the police and a fresh start, with the haunting thought of the crime he had committed wiped from his memory. In return, Dauvergne had given the Oriental a large sum of money and all his jewellery. Since then, although a dim, aching overlapping of his former life had often caused him to spend weary hours trying to understand what had happened, he had accepted the name of Poisson as his own and believed the Hindoo's story that

he had been very ill. He had remained in Chundah Lal's household as under-secretary, grateful for the post; and, while there, had seen many men come and go, but what had become of them and what took place at the gatherings of the ringleaders, he did not know. From the first he had been forbidden to enter the private rooms of the Hindoo, which were always guarded by native servants. Then, a month previously, there had come a fearful rumpus and panic, and they had fled in the night to a house in Chaville, some distance from Versailles. For several weeks he had been kept a prisoner in a cellar. Finally, the man who had brought him food and drink every day ceased to come; and when, driven by hunger, he had broken down the door, he discovered the house to be deserted. Fortunately, there was a car in the garage, and he had taken this and driven away, intending to sell it and leave the country. He had thought the car to be empty, but to his horror, when near the embankment, a cyclist ranged alongside and pointed a pistol at him, ordering him to stop. At the same moment Chundah Lal suddenly appeared behind him and seized him by the throat. Terrified, and hardly knowing what he did, he had swerved and smashed into the cyclist, but in doing so the car had struck the standard. At the instant of the smash Chundah Lal fired at him, the bullet ploughing a furrow in his scalp. A terrible fight had ensued, during which he had stabbed his assailant, and, as he believed, killed him. But when, terrified at what he had done, he tried to open the door of the car, he had fallen to the floor in a swoon. He had obviously feared he would be charged with murder, and when he learned that neither of the men had been found by the police, he had related that the blood was from his own wound, which had been

caused by the smash. Since we knew all about the Euthanasia, however, he divined that the truth would serve him best. What had become of the Indian and the cyclist he could not say. He remembered nothing until he came to his senses in the infirmary. Dufresne looked at Bertillon with a sceptical smile, but my chief's face was set and grim.

'Queer as it sounds,' he said, 'I believe every word of his story. These people have fled from town to town, back and forth, like rats in a trap. At every frontier our men have prevented them from escaping, and they are desperate. Did you know that the car had a dummy tank?' he asked Dauvergne.

The man shook his head. 'No; I saw there were two, but I thought the second was a reserve tank for long distances.'

Bertillon drew us aside. 'If we were dealing with ordinary criminals, I'd suggest putting the car in a garage as a trap, in the hope that they'd come to get the hidden money, but this Hindoo knows well we shall find the loot. It's evident he had intended to use the car in his flight, and the escape of Dauvergne upset his scheme. The box under the back seats is pierced for air, and Chundah Lal was probably hidden inside. Our best course is to search the house at Chaville, but it must be done secretly. It is our only hope of capturing these men. You had better go there to-night with Rousseau and Louys,' Bertillon added, turning to me. 'The three of you, well armed, should be enough. I'll have men hidden in the woods behind, within sound of your whistle, and all the roads shall be guarded.'

Meanwhile, Dufresne had given orders to the surgeon to place a man on watch near the patient.

'We are taking no risks,' he said to Dauvergne. 'They

may try to reach you even here. If you help us in this matter, we may be able to obtain a fresh trial for you. Facts have come to light since you disappeared of which I shall tell you later, but I'll say this now: it is quite possible you only wounded your sweetheart. Let that cheer you, and try to remember all that occurred day by day whilst you were at Versailles.'

Once outside, Rousseau beckoned to Louys and myself.

'I shall take a couple of pistols,' he said, 'and you had better do the same. Also electric torches and dark clothes. This is not going to be a picnic to-night. We meet at seven at the Montparnasse station. It's a long walk from there, but a less obvious way in case anyone is watching.'

The appearance of the house at Chaville was not pleasant. Perched on the hillside above the railway cutting, the building, a large, gable-roofed country mansion, stood half-hidden behind huge pines and tangled shrubbery. Inquiries elicited the fact that no one had lived there for twenty years, and the state of the grounds abundantly confirmed this. A high wall ran around the rear of the garden, which encroached upon the dark forest, whilst in front stout iron railings and a huge gate loomed dimly through tangled creeper and ivy. Rousseau pointed to a spreading oak. One of the branches just touched the top of the wall.

'That's our way in, mes enfants, but softly. I've brought a rope. We'll leave it dangling from the branch as a quick way out.'

By means of this we were able to drop to the grass without noise. The place appeared to be absolutely deserted, and a dank, foul odour of decay caused me to shiver with disgust. Bending low and creeping from

bush to bush, we approached slowly, feeling our way in the gloom. Now and then, for a second, Louys, who was in front, flashed the rays of his torch along the path, searching for pitfalls. Suddenly, as we were about to mount the three broken steps leading to the door, he uttered a shrill cry and swept his arm violently back, nearly hurling me from my feet.

'By God! Look!' he cried. The light from his torch swept along the ground, and we saw a long, brown, sinuous body slip into the undergrowth. There was no mistaking the zigzag markings on the back of the reptile, although I had caught only a fleeting glimpse.

'A cobra,' I gasped; 'here in Paris. That's worse than anything I expected. Keep your torch alight, Louys. There may be more of the beasts in the house.'

Hardly had I said this when a curious hissing sound caused us hurriedly to spring back and direct our lamps towards the sound. In the circle of light a most extraordinary creature was lazily creeping over the grass. It resembled nothing so much as a huge lizard made of shining multicoloured beads. Its tiny eyes moved ceaselessly from side to side, and a black forked tongue flickered restlessly about its jaws. At the sight, beads of icy perspiration rolled down my face.

'What is it?' Rousseau asked in a whisper.

'A Gila monster from Arizona,' I replied, with shaking voice. 'As deadly as the cobra. Here goes!' and swinging the long jemmy I carried, I smashed the flat, poisonous head to pulp.

Rousseau sighed with relief and wiped his face and hands, shifting his pistol from one to the other.

'Go on,' he muttered. 'We are as good as dead. This place is supposed to be haunted. Now I know why.'

'Haunted, indeed,' I replied angrily. 'We were ex-

pected, and these tropical reptiles have only just been let loose. They would not live a week outside a hot-house.'

Still not a sound came from the building, but I had a feeling that from some hidden spyhole our movements were being closely watched. Rousseau succeeded in fitting a key into the rusty lock and thrust back the door. As he did so, a loud groan and a rattling as of chains sounded from somewhere underground. Pistols ready, and with torches exploring every nook and corner, we advanced along the main passage. Dust lay thickly everywhere — too thickly, for Louys pointed out where it had been strewn over recent footprints.

'Faked — all faked ——' he was beginning, when a queer grunting and groaning again startled us, but this time it came from in front, and a moment later a vague dim luminosity caught my attention. It was a green phosphorescence that appeared to hover a yard or so from the floor, just inside a room, the door of which was ajar.

I at once extinguished my lamp, and my companions did likewise. Slowly the light became stronger, and the sharp outline of a monstrous face appeared. It was a vision such as only the diseased imagination of a madman could conceive. Pallid, almost shapeless, with gaping holes where the eyes and mouth should have been — yet it moved — it was alive. Gradually under it a body materialised — a body of bones and fluttering rags, until the horrid image of death stood there before us, one arm raised menacingly. My scalp tingled with horror. Louys had grasped my arm, and his fingers felt like steel. Now the apparition appeared to melt. It fluctuated and swirled in a luminous mist, which again steadied and solidified, until a huge ape emerged in the place of the skeleton. It was too much; raising my

pistol, I fired shot upon shot. A deafening, splintering crash succeeded the detonations, and from outside came the thin shouts of the detectives posted in the woods. For a minute we lost our heads and ran in panic to the door. Then, remembering our duty, we again faced the haunted room. Our comrades now came running to our assistance, and several magnesium flares illumined the scene. My shots had smashed a large sheet of plate glass, of which jagged fragments were still standing. On one side lay a broken skeleton, and behind the splintered glass was a huge stuffed gorilla. We were still examining this when Louys, who had been running from room to room, came back dragging a man whose face was covered by a white cowl. I was about to tear it away when Louys cried:

'Don't touch the head. The man is a leper. His face is awful. But I know him; it's Lastolle, the banker who disappeared some time ago. He was manipulating several switches when I caught him. There is a large accumulator plant below, and we can now have all the light we want. I've turned on the current.'

When the dusty lamps flooded the house with their welcome rays, I saw that we had been the victims of an ingenious trick. By throwing the current into a series of small green bulbs the skeleton we had found was reflected in the sheet of glass, placed at an angle of forty-five degrees across the room. This acted as a mirror. Behind the image of death, unseen in the dark, was the stuffed ape, and when it was illuminated by another hidden row of lamps, whilst the first were slowly turned out, the ape became visible through the skeleton.

'Clever!' Rousseau said shamefacedly. 'What fools we were to be scared by such a trick! But the effect was certainly weird.'

The reaction from our fright produced an overwhelming feeling of anger. We set to work at once in a kind of frenzy to search the house, and we found ample evidence of the activities of the Euthanasia. Best of all, hidden behind a painting, was a record of those whom the evil creature, Chundah Lal, had robbed of their personality within the last year. The woman we knew as Dolores d'Annecy was in reality Caroline Dobbritsch, a Polish actress, who, when but a young girl, had been implicated in a revolutionary plot. A photograph taken at the time was discovered among some half-burnt papers. Whether she also had fallen under the spell of the Hindoo or was his willing decoy, we could not tell.

Bertillon laughed loudly when I related our scare, but at the sight of the half-witted creature Lastolle, who had but lately been a strong, healthy man, his brows met in a hard line which boded ill for the men we sought.

'Lafontaine was lucky,' he said grimly. 'I see by this list that most of the others have sunk to the lowest level. Perhaps he intended to use them some day for criminal enterprises. Go along to the Halles and that evil place called "La Grappe d'Or." Better bring back every one you find in a police van and we'll sort them out.'

'And the devil responsible for all this?' I asked.

Bertillon shrugged his shoulders. 'We'll get him, but it will take time. If only he sticks to the woman, it will help us. You know my views. Women are the weak spot in every criminal's armour.'

After a much-needed rest, we spent the next night scouring the low haunts near the Halles, those vast markets where the food Paris consumes daily is collected. Soon our van began to fill with ragged and foul creatures. It was hard to believe that any of them could ever have been the well-dressed men — bankers,

manufacturers, and dandies — whose photographs I had with me. At last, towards dawn, we entered the dreadful place called 'The Golden Grape.' The stench was nauseating, and, by the dim light of an oil lamp, I saw a number of wretches sitting on a long, narrow bench. Before them was a taut, greasy rope, stretched level with their shoulders. On this they rested their arms, their heads pillowed on folded hands. And so these human derelicts slept. Even the cells in which we locked them must have come as a pleasant change. Among the twenty creatures thus collected, we found eight of our men, besides the two Americans whom Bannister was seeking. The doctor who attended them shook his head doubtfully when my friend asked if they would recover their memories.

'I cannot tell. Something inhuman has been done to them. It is not merely hypnotism. They have been subjected to a terrible poison, and there are traces of half-healed wounds on their heads. Only time will show.'

When we returned to headquarters, Bertillon was restlessly pacing his room, dressed in a long ulster and travelling cap.

'At last!' he cried impatiently. 'We must start at once. Chundah Lal is hiding somewhere near Grenoble. The woman has been seen driving through the town. I have commandeered a special train to take us there.'

Bannister accompanied us, and during the long trip we had ample leisure to discuss the strange events of the last few days. Only Bertillon remained aloof and silent. I could see that his brain was at work on the queer case, and his thoughts flew ever in advance of the rushing, roaring train. Never since I first became his assistant had I seen him so eager to capture a criminal.

As a rule his interest ceased when the investigation had solved the puzzle, but I remembered the dreadful company of lost souls we had collected, and my heart beat in sympathy with my chief. A murderous apache was a kindly being compared to this Oriental.

Two detectives with a powerful car met us at the station. The Hindoo and the woman had been tracked to a house in the mountains. There they cowered at bay, alone except for one servant, who also drove the car in which they had been seen several times exploring the roads. On each occasion patrolling gendarmes had caused them to return hurriedly to their retreat.

'There is only one road,' the local commissaire informed us, 'and I have placed guards on each side of the mountain. They can only try to escape towards Chambéry or take the narrow track which leads to Briançon. There is a precipice, five hundred feet deep, on one side, and an unscalable cliff on the other. Since you ordered me to wait, we have not molested them. But they cannot get away.'

'Then let us start immediately. I am anxious to see them safely locked in a cell,' Bertillon cried eagerly.

'But it is dark, monsieur. It would be most hazardous. You must wait till daylight.'

'No, no. We'll go at once. During the night they may escape on foot into the forests. I cannot risk it.'

The crack driver of the police was set at the wheel, and with a Blériot searchlight throwing a dazzling beam to light our way, we crept slowly up the narrow, winding path.

'There — look! That white building among the trees at the top,' the commissaire exclaimed. 'That's their house. Ah! They've seen our lights. Listen!'

Above the grinding of our own low gear the staccato

bellow and roar of an open exhaust came to our ears, and a circle of light flickered through the trees.

'Accelerate — force her!' Bertillon yelled to our driver. Hardly had the words left his lips when the ground heaved and the dull roar of an explosion swept down on us. A huge pillar of flames rose from the summit of the mountain and an inverted cone of stones and dust rushed upwards from the spot where the house had been a moment before. At the same instant a frightful jar caused our car to skid and smash against the rocks flanking the path, whilst a shower of stones and stunted firs rolled into the gulf below.

'Good God! He's mined the path!' the driver yelled. We hastily scrambled to the jagged breach and gazed in dismay at the havoc wrought by the blast.

Bertillon stood with both hands pressed against his temples, groaning in despair.

'Beaten — damn them! Beaten!' he muttered, over and over again.

'If you can all climb across, monsieur,' the driver said quietly, pulling my chief by the sleeve, 'I will try to jump the gap — it's only about a yard. I can rush the empty car at it.'

We all stared at the plucky fellow in admiration.

'Sure!' Bannister cried. 'You've a nerve, but it's a cinch if you can get up speed. Come on, we'll climb across above the road.'

Fascinated — as men assisting at a superb battle of gladiators — we lay above the broken road and watched the huge car slide back with silent engine. Then, roaring like a thing alive, it rushed towards the leap. In his excitement the chauffeur was gripping the contact of the syren on the wheel, and the coughing yell of the klaxon added its monstrous din to the rumbling and

clashing of falling rocks, as with a crash and shriek of straining metal the front of the car struck the path again. There were but a couple of inches to spare, and the hind wheels rotated frenziedly and sought to grip the crumbling earth.

Fear contracted my muscles and set my nerves twitching. My heart sucked at the blood in my veins, leaving me without volition; the nausea of terror caused my throat to close and my breath to come in gasps. Then I saw that the wheels held, and yelled in triumph. A moment later we tumbled in once more and roared away on the down grade. Bannister thumped the driver on the back delightedly, and the commissaire, his face the colour of clay, shouted:

'You shall have your sergeant's stripes for that, mon brave.'

In front, winding down the incline, was the escaping car. They had counted on barring our advance, and were driving slowly. When they realised that we had passed, we had already crept within a pistol-shot. Bannister drew his automatic, but Bertillon seized his arm.

'Only as a last resort,' he said. 'I want them alive.'

The Hindoo's car was a big Delage, and it now became a race — the strangest I had ever beheld. Although at times a mile separated us, the windings of the road were such that we could look down into the flying, swaying vehicle below. In it were two people: a man dressed in flowing robes and turban, and a woman. They were so near, though still distant because of the twisting path, that the temptation to leap the interval was almost irresistible. Abruptly, without warning, we were thrown violently forward and fell in a heap on the floor. Our driver had coolly taken a short cut across

jagged rocks and fallen branches, gaining so much by this move that now only a hundred yards separated us from our quarry. Instantly shots cracked and bullets whistled overhead. Bending low, our man held straight on.

'Shoot at the tyres!' Bertillon cried. But accurate aim was impossible, for our terrific speed and the constant short curves hurled us from side to side. The fleeing couple had now realised that their capture was imminent. A wild, triumphant yell suddenly pealed from the man with the turban. We saw him raise his hand and strike at the driver. Then, as the man fell sideways, he seized the wheel and rushed straight at the gaping precipice. For a dreadful instant — an eternity it seemed to our paralysed nerves — the car hung on the edge, then a fearful crashing, rending, smashing came to our ears as they disappeared into the gulf. For long minutes we stood, gazing down into the gloom. The police crossed themselves and muttered in awe-struck whispers.

'Dawn is not far away,' Bertillon murmured with trembling voice. 'We'll wait and identify them. But they've paid their debt. The chasm is nearly half a mile deep. *B-r-r-r*... what a leap!'

We settled down in our car, each busy with his thoughts, until the first rays of the sun coloured the snows above us. It was a difficult climb into the cañon. Fragments of the car had caught on projecting rocks, and halfway down we came on the mangled body of Caroline Dobbritsch, alias Madame d'Annecy. She must have died instantly, but her face was twisted with horror. The two Orientals were lying on their faces. One was the man we had seen when we called on Chundah Lal disguised as clerics. Bertillon stooped

towards the other, but hardly had he lifted the head when he started back with a yell of surprise.

'Tricked again — by Heaven! It is not Chundah Lal, but the secretary disguised with a wig and beard. The arch-fiend has got away.'

Turning on the commissaire with an angry gesture, he cried:

'Your men — where are they? I thought they guarded the roads?'

'They are lower down, at the narrowest bend. No one could have passed them.'

'Then the Hindoo never came here. We have been fooled. We shall not find him now.'

Sadly we returned to Paris. The Euthanasia was broken up, but the ringleader and many of his men were still free. The two Americans recovered and returned to New York with Bannister, but the others, among whom were Cottin and Codorin the taxi-driver, suffered constantly from delusions. In a short time paranoia developed, and it became necessary to intern them in the asylum at Charenton. The money and jewellery found in the dummy tank were never identified.

In return for his information and because the evidence discovered in the house at Versailles made his guilt doubtful, Dauvergne was pardoned.

'I shall not rest until I find Chundah Lal,' Bertillon said to me. 'Classify all the charts and exhibits, and put them on my "unsolved problems" shelf. The Sûreté has been warned, and will not relax its vigilance.'

EPISODE X

THE BESSARABO MYSTERY

STRANGE how certain phrases stick in the memory. The Honourable Ogden B. Chisolm, American representative of the International Prison Commission, once said to me: 'Every tenth cell in every prison contains an innocent person.'

That is probably an exaggeration, yet somehow the words struck home, for my own experiences have taught me that only too often, although the law claims its victims and the police shelve a case as settled, the real facts remain locked in the brain of the condemned, an inviolate secret. This applies more particularly to cases 'settled' on circumstantial evidence alone, and among these the Bessarabo tragedy stands out in bold relief as perhaps the most striking, dramatic, and even terrifying mystery. Terrifying because the only proof, if such it can be called, on which a woman was convicted as a murderess and sent to prison for twenty dreadful years, was the confession of her daughter, her own flesh and blood. It is not an old story, for the verdict was rendered in 1923. I could name a dozen men, judges, lawyers, and detectives, who cannot speak of the events without a shudder, and who would not dare to pledge their word that the woman was guilty. They voice their doubt by saying, 'If she was guilty, then she was indeed a monster!'

Twenty years behind prison walls are fearful to contemplate. Those who are burdened with a vivid imagination must shrink with horror at the thought that perhaps, after all, the unhappy woman was guiltless.

Both mother and daughter were detained two years at Saint-Lazare awaiting their trial, and during those two years the police laboured honestly and incessantly either to find proof of their guilt or to acclaim their innocence. And when at last the trial did take place, it was the daughter, cowed, broken, and shrinking like a beaten dog, who gave way at the eleventh hour and accused her mother in order to ensure her own safety. I will make no comments. If she lied, her punishment — that haunting remorse and ceaseless pain we call conscience — must be a thousand times more dreadful than the silence and monotony of the mother's cell. One thing can be said of Madame Bessarabo with certainty. She was one of those who are dogged through life by tragedy. Poet, dreamer, and visionary, she attracted dramatic events as a magnet draws iron. Poe's lines in 'The Raven' — 'whom immeasurable disaster followed fast and ever faster' — might have been written for her.

Such unfortunate women do exist. Only lately Isadora Duncan perished after a life of tragedy, as though a fantastic imp had resolved on her death.

The story as I shall relate it, although I have welded it into a simple, coherent narrative, is merely the résumé of the countless interrogations, reports, and extracts of dossiers, and the conversations and sequence of events are free from the least embellishment or addition.

The house of Madame Laforce, in the Avenida de los Caballeros, that handsome thoroughfare of Mexico City, was brilliant with multicoloured lights. Music and laughter floated in soft waves from the wide-open windows to charm the guests seated in the many secluded nooks of the patio, where the plashing fountains produced a deceptive impression of coolness. Flashing past

from light to shade, like so many gaudy butterflies, the whirling couples came and went in graceful swing and pirouette, dancing happily to the rhythm of a wild habanera. Abruptly the twanging guitars ceased, and a vibrant, sonorous chord quivered and died away as a prelude to the event of the evening. Beautiful Hera Mirtel, the poet and authoress of renown, was about to recite some of her own compositions. Her voice rose in a musical, monotonous chant, whilst she stood swaying like a wind-blown lily, her eyes seeking inspiration from a world invisible to the silent listeners. Erotic and strange, a mixture of Baudelaire and Maupassant, the verses stirred vague longings and crude emotions in the heart of a handsome Israelite, Charles Weissman, who, for reasons best known to himself, had adopted the more romantic name of Bessarabo. A Frenchman by birth, he was esteemed in Mexico for his gallantry and wealth, although the source of his riches was a mystery to all. But Mexico is not Paris, and the hint of hidden silver mines is always a facile explanation when nothing else will serve. He stood now, leaning against a marble column and watched this strange woman with fascinated gaze. Her tragic story was well known to him. She had come to Mexico many years ago and soon after her arrival married a rancher named Paul Jacques. Their happiness had been unobtrusive and the baby daughter who came to enliven their solitude wove an even closer web of joy around husband and wife. Then one day Madame Jacques — who had already achieved fame as the poet Hera Mirtel — had ridden into town on a panting, foam-flecked horse with the news that the rancher was dead. The chief of police and several rurales at once returned with the unhappy wife to the ranch, and found the Frenchman lying on the floor of the

veranda, a bullet in his brain. Numerous footprints and the marks of horses, which had been tethered to the rail, appeared to confirm the wife's story, which was that just as they were about to retire four masked riders had suddenly appeared out of the night. One of them had dismounted and, drawing a pistol, called out, 'Jacques, this settles the account.' On the words he had fired and killed her husband. They had then ridden away with no concern for the frenzied woman. Malignant gossip, of course, accused the wife of having murdered the Frenchman, since she was heir to all his money, but nothing could be proved. The four horsemen were never traced. For a while she had remained alone with her daughter at the hacienda, but had finally sold it and come to Mexico City, where her beauty and talent quickly made her a great favourite in the French colony. Paulette Jacques, now a lovely girl of fourteen, was strangely silent and reserved and appeared to be always lost in a reverie through which only the voice of her mother pierced.

'Money, fame, and beauty!' M. Bessarabo said to a friend when Madame Jacques had concluded her chanting recital. 'I might do worse. I shall ask her to marry me.'

'Not for the wealth of the Indies,' the friend had replied with a shudder, 'would I have that woman as wife. She is cursed with the evil eye. Her husband's fate will be that of all who approach her. She has even bewitched her daughter.'

But the Israelite evidently thought otherwise. A year later they were married and left for Paris, where they settled down in a comfortable house, 5, Square La Bruyère.

Unhappily, the extraordinary character of Madame

Bessarabo rebelled against the restraints and conventions of Parisian society. Her mystical novels, which many averred were written under the influence of hashish or the potent mescal drug of Mexico, gained her many admirers and as many adversaries. When the war swept the North of France, she became the marraine, and perhaps even something more intimate, to a young soldier at the front. But it seems her activities on behalf of the Red Cross interfered with the husband's shady transactions. Thus the seeds of discord were sown, and soon after the Armistice, quarrels, provoked by his infatuation for a pretty typist, Mademoiselle Nollett, became frequent. One day early in 1921, Madame Bessarabo received a letter from South America, which, according to the hall porter, caused her to faint. When the husband returned from his office, the porter heard the sounds of a violent dispute, which lasted some time. During the evening he was called to help carry several empty boxes and suitcases from the attic to the hall, and he saw that clothes, linen, and books had been heaped on the floor ready to be packed. It was evident that M. Bessarabo was extremely agitated and in a great hurry to get away, for he sent the porter for a taxi even before the boxes were locked. He then instructed him to take them to the Gare du Nord, and leave them in the cloakroom. What terrible news this letter contained is not known, but for days the apartment remained closed as though the inmates had left Paris. Then once more husband and wife appeared in public, but from that moment a sombre menace appeared to dog them. Doors and windows were always bolted, and M. Bessarabo never stirred out on foot. At one of the interrogations Madame Bessarabo declared that the letter was from a friend who waited until he had left France before

informing her of the intrigue with the typist. Whatever it may have been, a month later M. Bessarabo bought a pretty country house at Montmorency and ceased to live at Square La Bruyère. Rumour had it that Mademoiselle Nollett shared his solitude, but there is no proof of this. At the trial some of his friends related that he had several times been heard to say, 'If I do not go away, those two women will kill me.' To others, 'An enemy from the past is seeking my life.' Not long after his departure, a second mysterious letter with the South American postmark arrived, and the concierge who carried it upstairs overheard the daughter cry excitedly, just as he was shutting the door, 'I saw him, mother — I am sure it was he. Oh, my daddy; why did you tell me he was dead?'

Curiously enough, M. Bessarabo returned from Montmorency the same day in a jovial frame of mind, for he stopped at the door of the concierge's lodge and chatted good-humouredly a moment with the man. Several times during the evening shouts and cries of anger came to him in gusts as doors were opened and shut, and he heard the wife's voice raised in shrill expostulation. The quarrel lasted so long that twice he crept upstairs to listen, but, as often happened, they were speaking Spanish. He gathered, however, that the letter was the cause of the trouble. He remembered that several windows which overlooked the court remained illumined all night — an unusual thing. In the morning Madame Bessarabo came down, her eyes red with weeping, and informed the porter that they were all going away to live in the country. An hour later, he was called upstairs to help tie some ropes around a large trunk, which, with the assistance of the women, for it was very heavy, he carried to a waiting cab. Both mother and daughter

then drove away, but returned again in the evening, on foot. They left once more, late that same night, and did not come back until the following day. Instead of leaving for the country, mother and daughter continued to live at Number 5, Square La Bruyère, but the husband was not seen again and Madame Bessarabo explained to several friends who came to consult him on business matters that he was travelling abroad.

It was his chauffeur, a man named Decroix, who first sensed a tragedy. He called at the Montmartre police station in great agitation and said that his master had disappeared since the end of July and that he feared something had happened to him. This fitted in with a queer story related by a boatman living near the lake at Enghien. He had told a captain of gendarmes that, on August 1st, two women who, from his description, resembled Madame Bessarabo and Paulette Jacques, had knocked at his door at daybreak. At first he refused to open and spoke to them from his window, since no one ever came at such an early hour. The elder of the two explained that they wished to hire a boat and spend the day rowing on the lake, for the heat had been unbearable in Paris lately. This story was plausible enough, and the man thereupon accompanied them to the landing-stage. The women had appeared to be extraordinarily agitated for people who merely intended to pass a pleasant day, and conversed rapidly in a foreign tongue whilst he was getting the boat ready. Intrigued by this, he had hidden behind some bushes and watched when they rowed away. Although the morning mist still hung low over the water, he saw them land near some trees and drag a bulky package into the boat, which was so heavy that it required their combined efforts to lift it. He had slipped through the under-

growth, intending to surprise them, but when he arrived at the spot where they had landed, the boat was already some distance from shore and hidden by the swirling mist. He waited, nevertheless, for some time and felt sure he heard a loud splash soon after. To his surprise, the two women returned to the house whilst he was at breakfast, and the younger one said that her companion felt ill and she would have to accompany her to a doctor in town. The appearance of her friend amply confirmed this, for she was trembling violently and could hardly stand. He had fetched some cognac, and when the woman had swallowed it, he suggested that she should sit down and rest. He had then hurried away to examine his boat. Water had wetted the thwarts on one side as though a heavy weight had caused the craft to heel over and nearly capsize, and there was quite a pool at the bottom which had not been there before, but the package had disappeared. Obviously it had been thrown into the lake. His suspicions were by now thoroughly aroused; he sensed that his boat had been used for a criminal purpose, and he at once ran back with the intention of locking the women in a room until he could fetch a gendarme, but when he arrived at the house they had disappeared. The Sûreté immediately made discreet inquiries. Detectives interviewed the concierge and learned that mother and daughter had driven away with a large trunk as though they intended to travel, but that instead they had returned to Paris after only a short absence. When the police attempted to follow the trunk on its journey to the lake, however, matters became hopelessly involved. No one remembered having seen it. Railway employees, garage proprietors, and taxi-drivers were questioned in vain. The search lasted several days. Then, quite by chance, a

detective at the Gare du Nord learned that a young girl had dispatched a trunk to Nancy to be left till called for. The railway company's form had been signed Bessarabo, but the signature was not the husband's. It was furthermore discovered that on August 1st Mademoiselle Paulette Jacques had bought several yards of waterproof cloth and a long rope. The following day Madame Bessarabo had called on her notary and produced a power of attorney purporting to be signed by her husband, and insisted on withdrawing six hundred thousand francs. The trunk sent to Nancy was not traced until five days later. When opened by the police, it was found to contain the nude and doubled-up body of a man, a bullet in his brain. Unfortunately, the face was so disfigured that identification was almost impossible. A porter at the Gare du Nord remembered carrying the trunk from a cab to the slow goods department at the request of a girl, whom he later identified as the daughter. He had remarked on the weight of the trunk at the time and she had told him that it was full of books and papers. Thereupon mother and daughter were arrested and confronted with the gruesome discovery. Madame Bessarabo at once declared that the body was not that of her husband, who, she said, was young and handsome, whereas the horror in the trunk was a middle-aged man. For a time she refused to reply to the questions of the *juge d'instruction*, but finally related that M. Bessarabo had received two letters from Mexico, dispatched by a secret society to which he had belonged, and which he had somehow offended. Both letters warned him that his death had been decided upon. This had so frightened the man that he had packed his private papers and all the documents relating to the society in the trunk now before them and taken it to the Gare du Nord, where it

was arranged they should meet him. After they had waited some time, he had arrived in a cab with the trunk beside him, but instead of getting out, he told them a curiously involved story about a forgotten but very important appointment which it was imperative he should keep, adding that he would return shortly. Half an hour later, the same cab had drawn up with the trunk still inside, but no sign of the man. Instead, the cabman handed them a letter, in which M. Bessarabo made the strange request that they should send the trunk to Nancy and afterwards take train to Montmorency, where he would join them. Puzzled, but quite unsuspicious, they had followed his instructions. They had waited in vain all night at the country house, and the next day returned to their home in Paris, convinced that M. Bessarabo had either fled in fear of the secret society's menace, or that he had once more succumbed to the charms of the typist, Mademoiselle Nollett, and had gone abroad with her. She denied emphatically that she had ever been to Enghien, and when the boatman was brought in, he was unable to state positively that she was the woman to whom he had given the cognac, but he thought he recognised the daughter. Madame Bessarabo repeated the story of the cabman and the trunk at every interrogation, whilst the daughter, who shortly after entering the gloomy Saint-Lazare prison for women became seriously ill, refused to answer, opposing a dogged silence to all questions. Only once did she exclaim, 'If I told the true story of what happened, it would cause a commotion throughout France, but it is not my secret, it concerns my father.' Strangely enough, the mysterious cabman, who was traced only with great difficulty, confirmed the queer tale to a certain extent. He related that a man had first hired him

to take a trunk very much like the one found at Nancy to the Gare du Nord. On the way he had stopped him to speak to two women, then at the station he had alighted and ordered him to return with the box to where the two women waited and handed him a letter for them. He had carried out the instructions, and the younger of the ladies had then driven back to the goods department. He was confronted with the mother and daughter, but was not sure about either of them. The only evidence the police could obtain was that Paulette had consigned the trunk in which the body was found to the cloakroom at Nancy to be left till called for; that it was she who had forged her stepfather's signature to the power of attorney and the railway baggage form. It was Paulette, furthermore, who had bought the rubber sheet in which the body was enveloped, obviously to prevent the blood from the wound soaking through the fibre and cloth of the trunk. Although this proved her to have been an accessory, it did not indicate who had killed Bessarabo, if indeed it was truly he. Several times Madame Bessarabo had hinted that a mysterious American named Becker was the man who had killed her husband, thus tacitly admitting that the dead man was Bessarabo. When the *juge d'instruction* tried to pin her down to this, she evaded the trap by saying, 'I am merely assuming it is my husband.'

My friend Bannister was instructed to trace the mysterious Becker. After a lengthy but fruitless search, when we had already come to the conclusion that Becker, like Sairey Gamp's Mrs. Harris, was a purely imaginary person, M. Dufresne received the news one morning that a man had committed suicide in the Bois de Boulogne and in his pocket were papers in the name of Becker. Whether this was a mere coincidence, we

never discovered. So matters stood, when at last, after an investigation lasting two long years, the mother and daughter came up for trial for the murder of M. Bessarabo at the Paris Assize. Maître Moro-Giafferi, one of the greatest French lawyers, defended Madame Bessarabo, and Maître Raymond Hubert, the daughter. Again Mademoiselle Paulette Jacques sought refuge in silence, but the mother, whose intellect appeared to have degenerated during her long imprisonment, was foolishly voluble. Yet her system of defence never varied. Only the impression produced by her ceaseless arguments and dramatic posturing was so deplorable that her advocate, in despair, hit on a curious idea. He drew a picture of the guillotine on a large sheet of paper, and every time his client burst into a violent harangue, he held this up for her to see. It had the desired effect and caused her to cease abruptly.

Day after day the prosecution battled to prove the women's guilt. The lake at Enghien had been dragged in vain. Circumstantial evidence fully confirmed the theory the police had built up, that either from jealousy or for the sake of money, Madame Bessarabo, the Hera Mirtel so famous as a novelist and poet, had shot her husband in a fit of madness, probably the result of an overdose of hashish or some other drug, and that she had prevailed upon her daughter to assist in disposing of the body. Yet circumstantial evidence, overwhelming though in this case it appeared to be, was not enough to convince the jury. What the verdict might have been, no one can tell; but on the last day, when the prosecution had drawn a terrible picture of the women's guilt, and the presiding judge had already summed up; indeed, just as the jury were about to retire, the hypnotic control of her daughter — in which every one firmly be-

lieved — unexpectedly snapped. Madame Bessarabo had fallen back in a faint. And at that instant, as though awakening from a dream, the daughter Paulette Jacques suddenly sprang to her feet, threw out both arms in an appealing gesture and cried:

'The truth — the truth! I will, I must tell the truth!'

A sigh of horror, like a moaning wind seeping through the trees at night, swept over judges, jury, and public. Then dead silence followed. For a moment, as her mother stirred under the ministrations of a doctor, the girl sat sobbing, then in a low but vibrant voice she continued:

'My stepfather was a brute, a callous, sensuous brute, who made us very unhappy. He persecuted me with unpleasant attentions and he took no pains to hide his numerous intrigues. Mademoiselle Nollett was only one of them. On that dreadful night in July, I had gone to bed early. A letter had come which had caused my mother and stepfather to quarrel more bitterly than usual. From my room I heard them talking in loud voices for a long time. Finally, I must have fallen asleep. I was awakened abruptly by a loud report. Frightened at what this might mean, I sprang from the bed to go to my mother. To my surprise the door was locked on the outside. Never before had I been locked in my room. I was terrified. I called out, "Mother, mother, what has happened?" For a moment there was no answer, then I heard a sound as though a man were rinsing his throat. I felt somewhat reassured, and a moment later my mother cried, "Go to bed, Paulette. The water-heater for the bath must have been leaking and the gas went off with a bang when I tried to light it." Her voice was so shrill and agitated that all my

fears returned. I pounded with both fists on the door until at last my mother turned the key. There was a large mirror just opposite, and in it I saw a rigid, motionless shape on the bed, covered with a sheet, and the sheet had a crimson stain. Horrified at the awful vision, I exclaimed, "Mother, what have you done?" She replied, "My child, it was his life or mine. Go to bed now."

'But I could not take my eyes from that dreadful form on the bed. I wanted to inform the police, but mother became very angry and declared that we must have no scandal in our house.

'I have always obeyed my mother's commands. I asked her who was under the sheet, and tried to pull it away. She grasped my hand and cried, "Paulette — you must never know who it is. Believe me, it is not your stepfather. I cannot reveal the terrible secret of what has passed here to-night even to you, but, believe me, I did not kill him."

'I could not understand this, for she had just said, "It was my life or his!" I remembered, however, that for a long time, when already half-asleep, it had seemed to me that there were more than two voices speaking, and one had recalled vague memories of the days in Mexico. It had not been the voice of M. Bessarabo. A wild intuition caused me to spring forward and cry, "Mother, mother, it *was* daddy I saw ——"'

At that moment the mother, who had recovered from her swoon and sat stonily listening to a confession which might send her to the guillotine, sprang to her feet, and in a harsh, peremptory voice cried in Spanish, '*Calle te!*' ('Be quiet!')

For an instant the girl stared, a nameless horror in her dilated eyes, then her expression hardened, and,

although her tale was constantly broken by fits of sobbing, she continued:

'I believed that some fearsome tragedy quite beyond my understanding had occurred. I only desired to help my mother. At her request I dragged an old trunk from the attic and emptied it of the papers it contained. Yet I felt an irresistible urge to see the face under the sheet, and offered to help place the body in the trunk, but mother stopped me.

'"Go back to bed, child," she said gently, "it is nearly dawn. You must go out early and buy some ropes and rubber sheeting, but I shall not let you touch *It*." I could not sleep, of course. My heart felt as though it would burst. Then at nine o'clock I hurried to the Place Clichy and bought the necessary materials. When I returned, I imagined I heard a man's voice for a second just as I opened the door. I gave the waterproof cloth and the coil of rope to my mother, who locked me in my room. When I came out, the trunk was shut and corded, and the dreadful shape had gone. We had lunch, for such emotions make one hungry, and afterwards my mother brought me several sheets of paper and told me to type a power of attorney at her dictation. When it was done she said, "Now sign it 'Bessarabo' — you know you can write his hand." I shrank back and pointed out that I should be committing a forgery, but mother said, "Nonsense, his real name was Weissman. The name Bessarabo in itself is a fraud. It is a fictitious name which anyone may use. Sign!" What could I do but obey? It was a power of attorney giving us the right to my stepfather's money. When I again expressed a dislike for this, mother said, "You know well that he has no money. It is all mine; he owes it to us, and now he has gone away with that woman."

'Then later in the day we called the hall porter to carry the trunk to a cab. But it was so heavy we both had to help, and I explained that it contained books. At first I shrank from having anything further to do with the dreadful business, but what could I do, messieurs? If I am telling you the truth now, against my mother's wish, it is because I know she did not commit a crime, for when every one in prison thought I was dying, she came and swore to me that she was innocent. That belief helped me to get well. But although I can tell you all that I saw and heard, I cannot say what I suspect; nay, what I know, for it is not my secret. Well — at first we had thought to take and bury the body at Montmorency. Then mother said, "Fill in a form in your stepfather's name and send the trunk to Nancy, to be kept till called for."

'I understood then that he was still alive and merited to be accused of the crime.'

Again that frenzied 'Be quiet!' burst from Madame Bessarabo, and her glittering eyes were fixed menacingly on the girl. The judge held up his hand. 'If you interrupt again, madame,' he said, 'you shall be taken to a cell whilst your daughter speaks.'

A tearful cry came from the girl on the judge's words.

'Never fear, mother, I will only tell what I saw — I must — I cannot face the dreadful years of prison which will be our lot if I remained silent.' Then, again turning to the jury, she continued, 'I filled up a form and saw the loathsome trunk taken to the station. Then we went to a restaurant for dinner.'

A dead silence followed the last words. One could imagine the two women, the elder perhaps stupefied with some Eastern drug, and the slim, deliciously pretty girl of eighteen, calmly sitting down to a carefully

chosen repast, whilst the mysterious body travelled northward in a jolting train. The mother stood, a hard, contemptuous expression distorting her face, and looked slowly round the crowded, silent court. Maître Moro-Giafferi, her lawyer, sat in a huddled heap; despair expressed by his posture, his shaking hands that plucked nervously at his toga, and his bowed head. The judges were conferring in undertones. Maître Hubert, her daughter's counsel, was whispering to Mademoiselle Paulette, who had collapsed. The jury — those twelve men who were to decide her fate — were pale and silent.

Abruptly the presiding judge turned to her: 'Have you anything to say, madame?' he asked, pity for a mother betrayed by her own flesh and blood piercing the formal words.

Slowly the woman shook her head, 'No, nothing, except that I beseech you to acquit Paulette; she only obeyed my orders.'

One by one the jurors filed out and the two women were led away. Three quarters of an hour elapsed; then the foreman stood up and in a clear voice replied to the various formulas of French procedure, the gist of which was: 'Guilty, with extenuating circumstances,' for the mother; 'Not guilty,' for Mademoiselle Paulette.

Relief and indignation were blended on every face. There was no mistaking the meaning of this verdict. By betraying her mother, the daughter had bought her freedom.

Twenty years' hard labour was the sentence which Hera Mirtel, poet and dreamer, received without flinching. For the last time she spoke, and all her grandiloquence, all her pose, had fallen from her like a clownish mask.

'Thank you, gentlemen, for acquitting little Paulette. I swear to you that I, too, am guiltless. Bessarabo is alive, in America. The man in the trunk was his enemy.'

And there the matter rests. As my chief, M. Bertillon would have said, 'Put the case on my "unsolved problems" shelf! We may still discover the truth.' There were not many on that shelf in his time!

Madame Bessarabo — C 45 — is still a silent shadow behind the grey walls where civilisation hides its failures. Will the truth be known fifteen years hence when she is released? Her daughter has fled to South America, perhaps to seek that father who, as some think, was never killed. She may yet return to tell the true story of the tragedy.

EPISODE XI

THE VENDETTA

I WAS about to enter Bertillon's office with some photographic prints when Durand, his confidential secretary, came stumbling through the doorway with flushed and angry face. He stopped when he saw me and smoothed his ruffled hair.

'Unless the chief sent for you, don't go in; he's in one of his black moods. He didn't speak to me — he barked. I thought he was going to throw the case-book which I brought at my head.'

Rousseau, who had joined us, chuckled hoarsely. 'No wonder! The *juge d'instruction* and the Prefect of Police have been making themselves objectionable. Even Bertillon is not infallible, but they seem to think so.'

'I suppose these photographs of smashed safes which I've just finished have something to do with the matter,' I suggested; for I had been absent several months in Marseilles and out of touch with the latest cases at our Paris headquarters. Rousseau glanced at them casually and nodded.

'They certainly have, but they are only part of the problem.'

At that moment a harsh voice called my name, and as the electric bolt which my chief operated from his desk caused the door to swing open, I heard him exclaim irritably:

'For Heaven's sake, come in or go away! Nature should have equipped us with earlids to shut out sound at will. No one seems to be able to do anything but talk to-day.'

The instant I entered, the magnet in the pneumatic cylinder released the piston with a vicious spang, and at once the padded inner door also slammed shut.

I tiptoed noiselessly over the soft carpet and sank into a comfortable chair.

Bertillon was sitting with his hands pressed rigidly to his temples, and I was surprised and shocked at the change in his appearance. His beard, usually so neatly brushed, looked like a thorny shrub, and it was apparent he had not shaved that day. Minutes passed in complete silence. A shaded table-lamp still shed a pale circle of light, although a cold streak of winter sunshine struck full on his desk. It was obvious that my harassed chief had sat there through the long night. In front of him was a tray full of cigar-stumps, and an electric coffee-pot sizzled by his side. At last he looked up with heavy, inflamed eyes, and his usually good-natured mouth twisted into a wan, pathetic smile that instantly vanished.

'Sorry, mon ami! My nerves are on edge. I seem to be unable to think, somehow. What have you got there?'

I placed my prints on M. Bertillon's desk; then, without a word, opened a cupboard crammed with chemicals, mixed a stiff dose of valerian and barbituric acid, to which I added a little cognac, and handed him the brew.

He sniffed at it and nodded understandingly when I removed the coffee. I had fully expected him to resent my interference, but instead, to my joy, he gulped the contents of the glass with a wry face, sank back with a sigh, and closed his eyes. Slowly his tense expression relaxed and the blood began to pulse more regularly in the swollen arteries. Half an hour passed, while neither

of us moved or spoke. Finally, Bertillon roused himself.

'Thanks — you did right. Caffeine and strychnine have kept me going, but I suppose there is a limit to human endurance. I'll just give you an outline of what we have to do this morning. You have been away so long that you know nothing of our latest problem. Whilst you are collecting the required outfit, I'll lie down; for we must be prepared for a thorough search before valuable traces are destroyed. Call up the garage, will you, and order a fast car with a good driver?'

Whilst waiting for the exchange to put me through to the transport department, I covertly watched Bertillon. His flexible hands were busy arranging a sheaf of documents, but the drugs I had administered were already paralysing his reflexes, and I perceived that he was battling with an overpowering desire to sleep.

'Will you not rest until noon, sir?' I suggested quietly. 'Colbert can guard the place until you come. Meanwhile, if you give me your instructions, Rousseau and I will carry out a preliminary investigation.'

Bertillon rose unsteadily and stifled a yawn.

'Go along, then. I trust you implicitly. Nothing must be disturbed, hein? It seems a double murder has been committed at Montmorency. Rousseau knows where it is and what to do. I'll join you when I've rested, but tell your assistant to take plenty of lamps; we may have to work until late, and daylight fades quickly at this time of the year.'

I found Rousseau in the long gallery where our charts are classified, and related what had passed.

'I can sympathise with our chief,' he said with a queer gleam in his eyes. 'This gang of housebreakers is unique, and it looks like a bad defeat for us.'

'Why,' I exclaimed in surprise, 'you don't mean he is so worried about a mere series of burglaries? I've had a lot of work connected with them since I came back, but I imagined it was just the usual thing. He said something about a murder.'

'Yes; and I fancy it was committed by the same gang. Their methods are something entirely new. Country houses in Garches, Saint-Germain, Versailles, and Chantilly have been robbed with impunity, although they were occupied. The queer part is that twice the thieves used dynamite to break into safes, yet the inmates heard nothing. They also possess a new tool which cuts a six-inch hole through tempered steel. Bertillon believes it to be a species of circular frame which grips the surface by means of four pegs, for which small holes are first drilled. An inner rim with tiny, incredibly sharp teeth then revolves slowly, but with irresistible pressure. They heat the steel through which they intend to cut with a Fouché blowpipe, and when it is white-hot direct a stream of oxygen against it. This renders the metal porous and brittle. They take only jewellery, plate, and money. Their hauls already amount to more than two million francs. What we cannot understand is why they have never been surprised nor seen, since they appear to operate with complete indifference to noise. They evidently dress in black, and wear a kind of hood; tales of ghosts flitting about the gardens have drifted in.'

'Do they leave no finger-prints?' I asked.

'Yes; we have several times found a queer circular smudge and the impression of a huge right hand on the safes and furniture, but so far the marks have not been identified. There are one or two points which the chief believes to be very important. The burglaries did not

begin until the weather became wintry, and all the houses they entered have old-fashioned hearths besides steam heating. The robberies generally took place when the inmates were assembled in the salon, where a log fire was blazing. In every case they appear to have fallen asleep whilst reading or chatting, and awoke to find the windows open and their valuables gone.'

'Nonsense!' I exclaimed. 'You know well enough that the narcotics criminals use are only effective in food or drink.'

'I know, nevertheless, this gang has discovered an efficient device. We found several lumps of lead, and in one instance a queer perforated iron tube among the ashes. A typical case is that of a notary at Ville d'Avray. He informed us that his safe had been opened and a large sum of money taken. He was known to be in financial straits, and was heavily insured. The insurance company accuses him of having faked the robbery, because the safe, an old-fashioned affair, had been opened with his own key, which was still in the lock. He also averred that he had fallen asleep on a couch in front of the fire after a hard day's work, and he awoke shivering with cold at two in the morning. The fire was out and a window stood wide open.'

'Probably the insurance people are right. He read about these robberies in the papers, and they suggested the idea of simulating a burglary.'

Rousseau shook his head. 'There was a round smudge and the print of a thumb and first finger on the window. The marks were the same as those found in the other houses. He couldn't fake that! Besides, we arrived before dawn and immediately questioned the valet. The fellow appeared weak and ill. He was breathing in gasps when we entered his room, and was

only brought round after much trouble. He remembered carrying coffee and brandy into his master's room after dinner, about ten o'clock, but he did not remember going to bed. The coffee still stood untouched on a small table. On the carpet we found a large stain where cognac had been upset, and the decanter on the tray was half-empty. There were also microscopic fragments of glass near the spilled brandy, and a liqueur glass was missing. The servant's sleeve and shirt-cuff were soaked with cognac, and on his right hand was a small cut and traces of the spirit. Furthermore, he had gone to bed in his day-shirt instead of putting on the pyjamas he always wore at night. Caught in a cuff-link was a leaf, and on the stairs leading to his room we discovered a twig torn from a small palm. When we examined the plant itself, which stood near the stairs, we perceived that it had been upset, but replaced. Some earth had fallen to the floor, and the heavy china pot was not standing on the circle it had marked in the varnish of the mahogany pedestal. The inference is clear. The servant had become unconscious and fallen to the floor whilst pouring out the cognac. He had been carried to his room, undressed, and put to bed.'

'The cognac was drugged!' I hazarded.

'No; coffee and brandy were analysed. There was nothing wrong with them. These people have invented some new trick. Bertillon discovered that the day before the burglary the steam heating had gone wrong, and because of this a fire was lit. Furthermore, there was the open window, obviously for ventilation. Heaven alone knows what it means. One other detail, which at first made us hope that we should quickly pick up the trail of the band, is that in every instance a new maid had been engaged a few days before a robbery was

committed, and she left soon after. Three of these girls have been traced to other situations, and appear to be quite respectable. But in the case of the notary, the maid disappeared the evening the safe was rifled, and has not been found. All the known receivers are being watched, so far without result; nor has any informer come in. At four this morning an urgent call came through from the gendarmerie at Montmorency. Apparently two people have been killed, and although we have no details as yet, Bertillon believes that the same criminal organisation has been at work. He is convinced that the open log fires are in some way connected with all these crimes. We have discovered that in every instance the wood came from a shop in the rue Thoulozet at Montmartre. I have been ordered to go and have a look at the place. Put on some old clothes and come with me. Colbert can drop us at the Place Clichy on his way to Montmorency.'

We had no difficulty in finding the place, for Inspector Louys and two of his men dressed as workmen were busy repairing an imaginary hole in the pavement opposite the premises of a coal and wood merchant. Above the gate were the words 'Dupont et Cie, wholesale dealers.'

There was no concierge, but when we entered a yard littered with logs of pine and olive wood, a bold, handsome girl came forward at once with a lazy, impertinent smile and barred our way. She surveyed us for a moment through a cloud of cigarette-smoke before inquiring what we wanted. I explained that we had come to buy a stock of wood to sell in the suburbs. Whilst we haggled over the price, I watched her brilliant black eyes flicker over us from head to foot with a curious, defiant expression. Suddenly she threw away her

cigarette and called sharply, 'Angelo, come here.' Instantly the door of a tiny office of rough boards swung wide and a tall, muscular man with the curly hair and flowing beard of a Jewish patriarch appeared in the opening. He shuffled down the steps with a queer, dragging limp, and I noticed that his left shoulder was deformed. The advent of this extraordinary creature was so unexpected that for a moment I forgot the part I was playing and stared in undisguised amazement. As he passed the girl, she said something rapidly in a foreign tongue, at which he scowled fiercely, and, pointing to the gate we had left open, motioned her to shut it. Before either of us grasped her intention, she had released a heavy bar from the wall, and we heard the slam of a spring lock.

'If you intend to rob us,' Rousseau growled, 'you'll not get much.'

The girl laughed shrilly and clapped her hands. This was a signal, for at once a squat, sunburned man advanced from a side door, followed by a stalwart Negro.

'Well,' I exclaimed, 'you are queer people! We come to buy wood, and it looks as though we've dropped into a den of thieves.'

'These men will count your logs,' the bearded man replied with a leer. 'Come, Concha.' With that he turned and limped through the doorway. I saw Rousseau tense as though about to spring after him, but he restrained himself in time, for the two assistants had drawn together, their fists clenched menacingly.

'Open that gate!' I cried sharply. 'I don't like your manners. We'll buy our wood elsewhere.'

Without a word the Negro pulled a key from his belt and lifted the bar. We hurriedly crossed the street, but Louys and his men were no longer to be seen.

'Stay here,' Rousseau said in a low voice. 'I'll call a couple of police to guard the rear, and telephone to the Sûreté. Then we'll also set a watch at the gate. Bertillon was right: this is the gang's headquarters, and they would have killed us had they been sure we were there to spy on them.'

Five minutes later he returned in a car.

'Jump in. Dufresne wants us to drive to Montmorency at once. He is sending men to raid this place to-night. Meanwhile, detectives will follow anyone who leaves.'

The captain of gendarmes who had telephoned from Montmorency arrived just as we drew up in front of the villa where the tragedy had occurred. Dufresne and Bertillon were already waiting, and immediately questioned him. His story was that, whilst they were making their rounds towards dawn, two of his cyclist police had been nearly killed by a large touring-car which had suddenly appeared out of the gloom, without sounding a warning and with no lights showing. It had come so abruptly and noiselessly that they were convinced it had been standing not far away, and started on the steep down-grade of the road at sight of their lamps. The driver had swerved towards them and deliberately attempted to knock them over. Before the startled men had recovered from the shock, the car disappeared in the swirling mist, but they caught a fleeting glimpse of a huddled mass of passengers, who appeared to be wrapped in black cloaks which covered their faces. The police were at first inclined to give chase, but the speed of the car convinced them that this was hopeless. Instead, one had pedalled at full speed to the gendarmerie and telephoned a description of the mysterious vehicle to the various stations, while his colleague had

walked slowly along the path until he discovered a patch of oil which proved that the car had indeed been stationed for some time in front of a house belonging to a M. Cavallo, who was well known in Montmorency. The gendarme had tested the door and found it shut, but to his surprise, since the night was bitterly cold, the window of the drawing-room on the ground floor stood wide open. By the light of his electric torch he saw that two people were lying on their faces in front of a wide, old-fashioned fireplace. With commendable prudence he had thrown his cape over the window-ledge and climbed in, taking care not to disturb anything. The two prone figures were M. Cavallo and his wife, and both appeared to be dead. Fortunately there was a telephone in the house, and the gendarme at once telephoned to his chief, who arrived soon after with a doctor. A cursory examination convinced the doctor that life was indeed extinct, and the police officer had thereupon placed two men on guard and reported the matter to M. Dufresne at the quai des Orfévres.

The room in which the bodies lay was on the right of a wide corridor. A large table stood in the centre, and a leather couch and two armchairs were grouped before it, facing a wide hearth, in which a heap of flaky ashes showed that a wood fire had been recently lit. On the carpet just in front of one of the chairs was the huddled shape of a woman. She had slipped from the cushions to the carpet, and lay with knees drawn up and arms outflung as though she had attempted to rise, but had been overcome by some intangible, brutal force which had killed her instantly. There was no sign of a wound, and her curly black hair and filmy lace dress were not even disarranged. The man had evidently attempted to reach his wife when he felt the approach of death. One

hand still clutched the wire of a table-lamp, which he had dragged to the floor, whilst a book which he had been reading rested against the iron fender. His right hand gripped the woman's shoulder. Bertillon dropped to his knees and lifted each head in turn.

'They have been poisoned,' he muttered, 'yet there is no drink in the room.' For a moment he bent over the unfortunate woman, his nose close to her lips.

'No narcotic has been used this time, but cyanic acid. Now, I wonder ——' His eyes wandered to the ashes in the grate.

'Search these, Rousseau,' he ordered sharply; 'but be careful. Put on gloves, and tie a handkerchief over your nose and mouth.'

While Rousseau probed in the hearth, I prepared my cameras. Abruptly Rousseau gave an exclamation and held out a perforated metal cylinder. Bertillon sprang eagerly forward and, seizing the tube with the tongs, carried it to the window.

'That's it. The same method. These tubes are filled with drugs and inserted in hollow logs, which are then glued together again. In this case it was sectioned and contained sulphuric acid and cyanide. When the fire heated the metal, the two chemicals combined, and the most deadly of gases spurted out through those holes and killed these people. Photograph the room and the bodies!' Bertillon added, turning to me, 'and place this devilish invention in one of our boxes.'

Rousseau had meanwhile continued his search of the fireplace.

'There are several iron pipes, Chief, and some lumps of lead,' he exclaimed.

'That was to be expected,' Bertillon replied. 'One would not be enough. Those lumps were probably lead

cylinders, but the fire melted them. Pack them all carefully and fill a tin with some of the wood ashes. I see there are still some logs stacked in that brass box. They must be removed to the laboratory.'

When I had taken the required photographs, Bertillon handed me paper and pencil, drew a powerful torch and his favourite lens from a pocket, and once more dropped to his knees beside the woman. His flexible fingers flickered like an insect's antennæ over dress, hair, and face. They probed minutely, yet disturbed nothing. Suddenly I saw him peer eagerly at the left hand, which lay clutching the carpet.

'Ha! This is something! A tiny dagger tattooed between thumb and forefinger. The shape is Italian — no — Corsican!' he exclaimed shrilly. 'As always, a woman will lead us to the criminals. She has the black hair and olive skin of the South. A vendetta, I'll wager.' Rising quickly, Bertillon walked to the door. 'I see that this house, like the notary's, has steam heating,' he said, 'but the radiators are cold. Go and look at the furnace and boiler, Rousseau.'

Hardly had my colleague disappeared when Bertillon quickly stooped, and I saw that he had picked up something which glittered from a bearskin rug against the wall.

'A silver medal,' he said. 'On one side is a bull with horns lowered, as though about to charge, and beneath it "*Buena suerte.*" On the other side just the word "Sevilliano." A Spanish matador's charm, I fancy, and Sevilliano is the fellow's name. It was on a chain which became entangled with the key in that desk, and the last link snapped. A Corsican dagger and a Spanish charm — what a queer mixture! Well, there is nothing further here. Have you noted the details? Then come with me.'

I followed Bertillon into the hall just as Rousseau appeared.

'Someone tried to light the furnace, Chief, for the wood had caught, but it went out again, and there is a strong smell of smoke in the cellar. I believe the flue is stopped up.'

'Good! Then we'll examine the top floor and the chimney. Come along.'

Hinged to a beam passing under the sloping roof was a ladder which led to a skylight, and on each side were servants' rooms. The door of one stood wide open. It had obviously been occupied, and showed every sign of a hasty departure. The electric light over a small mirror was still switched on, and some white powder had been spilled on the floor. The bed had not been slept in, but a depression in the blankets showed where a heavy bag had rested. Bertillon pointed to a piece of leather on the floor. It was the flap of a pocket mirror. 'One of the girls, again,' he said. 'This gang always places a confederate inside the house. The same method was employed for the burglaries. Those maids we traced are undoubtedly members of the band.'

'There is a woman's footprint on this ladder,' Rousseau cried. 'The skylight has been opened quite recently, some flakes of rust from the iron frame have fallen to the ground, and there is the mark of a hand on the dirty glass.' A moment later we heard his voice from the roof.

'A sack has been stuffed into the chimney — that's why the furnace could not be lighted. I've got a hook into it. Shall I bring it down?'

'Yes, but wrap it in paper. It must be examined,' my chief answered. 'Now let's go to the bedrooms below.'

Cavallo and his wife had occupied separate rooms.

Bertillon hardly glanced at them, but went straight to the bathroom. He remained there so long that I pushed open the door. He looked up at the sound and I saw that his face was flushed and his eyes unnaturally bright. His whole attitude exuded triumph, yet he was only holding an empty silver frame, which had probably contained a portrait. As I advanced, he showed me a little slip of some reddish-brown substance, which for the moment I could not identify.

'A broken fingernail, mon ami, stained with henna, and grey underneath. An Arab or Soudanese left that.'

'The fellow we saw in the rue Thoulozet?' Rousseau exclaimed over my shoulder.

'Undoubtedly. I imagine this silver frame contained the dead woman's portrait. That dagger tattooed on her hand and your description of the bearded man — who is probably the leader — convinces me that this double murder is a Corsican vendetta. If so, the fellow may try to reach his island home when he discovers we are on his track. That place in the rue Thoulozet must be raided immediately and all the inmates arrested. Pack this empty powder-box. The bodies can be removed now. I have all I want.'

A moment later I heard my chief telephoning to the various departments at the Sûreté. But we were not to capture these cunning criminals so easily. Just as we were preparing to return to Paris, Inspector Louys arrived in a police car. His clothes were torn and charred in several places and his head bandaged.

'A fire broke out in the wood-dealer's yard soon after I had posted my men,' he explained. 'We broke down the gates, but the place was filled with poisonous fumes. The firemen had to send for masks, and when we succeeded in getting into the house, there was no one there.

They evidently had a secret exit, but we couldn't find it because the whole building collapsed.'

Now began a rush of feverish activity at headquarters. No one thought of rest. Cablegrams were dispatched to Corsica and Marseilles, and Rousseau, Colbert, and Inspector Louys were instructed to search the haunts of the underworld for the bearded man and his accomplices. Descriptions of the girls who had worked as maids in the various houses were also circulated everywhere. Bertillon surprised me by adding a one-armed man with black hair to the list. I inquired what led him to believe in the existence of such a person.

'Use your brains, my friend,' he said with a smile. 'He is the skilled expert of the gang. Every safe these people broke into bore the traces of a round smudge and the marks of a right hand only.'

'And the black hair?' I asked curiously.

'Corsica and Spain have few fair men. But that is only a guess on my part.'

Morning had come when I carried the results of our laboratory work to Bertillon's office. With him was M. Duperret, the *juge d'instruction*, and Dufresne. With a muttered apology my chief glanced at the photographs and reports. Then he straightened up and said: 'My investigation is now complete. This murder of M. Cavallo and the woman — for she was not his wife — has given us definite results. The band which committed all these burglaries and the murder at Montmorency is composed chiefly of women. Apache girls, if you like! There is also a Negro and two Spaniards. One of these is a noted cracksman who lost his arm in Morocco, and the other a former matador known as Sevilliano. Both have been convicted in Madrid for housebreaking. But the leader and brains of the gang is the strangest personality we

have yet encountered. He is a Corsican named Angelo Ferrari; he studied biology and chemistry in Rome, became a doctor and practised for some years in Ajaccio. There is a break of fifteen years in his history, but it is believed he travelled much and was esteemed for his medical skill in Abyssinia. That explains the black confederate. Four years ago he married Elsa Lavalette, a beautiful woman whose life he saved. But she soon tired of her husband and ran away with Cavallo. Ferrari swore the vendetta against the man and his faithless wife, and must have traced them to Paris. I fancy he formed this gang only in order to find them, for none of the spoil has been sold so far as we know. The girl who was seen in the rue Thoulozet will lead us to Ferrari. Her name is Concepcion. She is the wife of Sevilliano, but in love with the Corsican. It was Ferrari who conceived the idea of the poison in the logs. Here is one of them; we have removed the drugs,' and Bertillon held out a piece of wood in which a perforated metal tube had been inserted. 'We have not yet analysed the stuff, but when heated it gives off a dense gas which acts as a powerful narcotic. The spectograph has disclosed the presence of carbon monoxide and traces of chlorine. It will be some time before we discover the exact composition. But the murders were committed with cyanide.'

'How did you find out about Ferrari, monsieur?' Duperret asked with unwonted respect.

'I was convinced that poison was being used in a novel manner and became suspicious of the logs when I discovered that they all came from the same place. We traced them weeks ago through the delivery vans. But since the business in the rue Thoulozet appeared to be genuine, I feared that a premature search of the premises would merely put the criminals on their guard. Fortu-

nately, the day after the murder, Ferrari was foolish enough to show himself, and I at once telegraphed his description to Ajaccio. I received his history this morning.'

'I take it the Corsican police also identified the dead woman?' the magistrate said, rising.

'No; we've had no time for that. But they identified the tattooed dagger. It is the mark of Ferrari's clan. You may rest assured we shall soon capture them all.'

When I arrived at the Sûreté the next day, Rousseau was waiting in my office with an envelope containing a few grains of strongly perfumed powder and a broken pocket mirror.

'Bertillon wishes you to compare this powder with that in the box we found in the bathroom at Montmorency. I expect this mirror fits the leather flap picked up in the servant's bedroom.'

'Where did you get it?' I asked.

'Oh, powder and glass were in the belt of a girl who was lying in a field at the Plaine Saint-Denis close to the Spanish colony,' Rousseau remarked casually. 'Quite dead, too. The doctor says she was strangled. The colony was at once raided and we got the one-armed expert. His name is El Jugador. He's in a cell below. The others are still in hiding somewhere, but we've taken care to let the man's arrest be known. The papers are printing a brief noted to the effect that he appears willing to confess.'

'You think they'll communicate with him?'

'Bien sûr — it's an old trick but a good one. He may write and receive letters and have his meals sent from a restaurant.'

Rousseau was right. The following day Bertillon

handed me an envelope which was addressed to our prisoner.

'See if you can find the message,' he said with a smile.

It was just a short letter telling the man not to worry, and that his wife and children were well. 'Invisible ink,' I suggested.

'Oh, no — nothing so crude. Remember, Angelo is a very clever fellow. The message is under the postage stamp and written in cypher with acid. All he has to do is to soak the envelope in water until the stamp comes off and then hold it against the steam pipe in his cell. We photographed it by transparency and got a good print. It seems 'he is not to talk and Concepcion will apply for permission to visit him as a Salvation Army lass.' Well, we shall raise no objection. Louys will follow Concepcion, of course. By the way, did you analyse the powder Rousseau brought you?'

'Yes, sir. It's the same as that in Cavallo's bathroom.'

Bertillon nodded. 'I thought so. That girl found strangled near the Spanish colony was evidently Cavallo's maid, and one of the band. She had a cypher message hidden in her stocking. It seems Ferrari did not mean to murder his faithless wife, for it was the text of a telegram intended to call her away. It was never sent; we've investigated at the post-office. That's why the Corsican executed her. She was formerly a notorious hotel thief named Charlotte la Belle.'

The next day a demure, middle-aged woman in the familiar blue of the Salvation Army came to visit El Jugador. The disguise was perfect, and had we not read the message under the stamp we should never have recognised handsome Concepcion. A warder remained present during the interview and reported that she had

only spoken of religious matters, and given the prisoner several tracts. These were seized and on the margin of one, written with the wax end of a vesta, was a long message informing the Spaniard 'that the chief would try to bribe the warders so that files could be smuggled in to him; or, as a last resort, they would attack the police van after the trial. Meanwhile, the chief and Sevilliano were preparing to cross to Corsica, where they would organize a band with the help of the notorious Michaeli. Concepcion would remain in Paris at the old address.'

Louys returned late in the evening. Concepcion had been so sure of her disguise that he had been able to follow without arousing her suspicion. Ferrari and his band were hiding in cunningly masked cellars below a leather factory at the Plaine Saint-Denis. Within an hour we had posted men in every alley leading to the building, which was in the worst street of the Spanish quarter. Dufresne and Bertillon supervised the arrangements, for they knew that every house was a death-trap and honeycombed with secret subterranean passages. The moment we appeared, invisible watchers called to each other in guttural Catalonian from yawning doorways, and warning whistles sounded from all sides. It had to be a rush on foot, for neither car nor cycle could thread the labyrinth of dirty streets, which were littered with huge heaps of scrap iron, refuse, and barrels.

We had almost reached the factory when a fierce mob suddenly dashed at us with gleaming knives, but a volley fired over their heads caused them to scatter, and the uniformed cycle police at once formed a double hedge to guard our backs. Broken telegraph-poles made excellent battering-rams, but it was some minutes before the heavily barred doors of the building gave way. The interior was divided into countless workrooms, but only

empty vats and rusty machinery met our gaze as we ran frantically up and down the rotting stairs. Abruptly Rousseau gripped my arm and pointed to a tiny streak of light on the ceiling which came from a trapdoor under a mound of untanned hides. Willing hands cleared these away and we scrambled down a crazy ladder into a stone-paved cellar. Sitting on upturned barrels and boxes in a corner, calmly smoking cigarettes, were six girls, and behind them, pistol in hand, stood Concepcion. It was obvious that these girls had been ordered to hold us until the leaders escaped. We could not treat them as we would men and they struggled like furies when the detectives attempted to pass, whilst Concepcion laughed and shouted with glee. When at last they had been carried, clawing and biting savagely, to the room above, we discovered a second tunnel under the improvised seats. This led to the chemical laboratory and workshop where the poison tubes had been manufactured, but by that time Ferrari, the Spaniard, and Concepcion had escaped.

Dufresne at once commandeered a special train to take us to Marseilles. We knew that if the leader and his two accomplices reached the Mediterranean coast before we arrived, it would be an easy matter for them to obtain a boat and escape to Spain or Corsica. The chief of the Marseilles police was already waiting on the platform when we descended from the dusty, uncomfortable train.

'We have every likely place watched,' he said. 'So far they've not been seen. I posted special men at the harbour the moment I received your message and descriptions. You'd better come to the commissariat and rest, then we'll comb through the haunts of all those likely to shelter the fugitives.'

It seemed incredible that with the entire French po-

lice force seeking three such conspicuous people, they should be able to disappear, yet as the days passed we began to fear that in some fashion they had succeeded in putting to sea. Then abruptly Rousseau came with the news that Sevilliano had been seen talking to a boatman near the harbour. A gendarme had followed him to a garage on the hillside, and we caught him as he came out. He was dressed only in a singlet and blue overalls and his powerful arms were oiled. Had it not been for the steel chain I succeeded in twisting round his wrist, he would have got away. He laughed when I asked where Ferrari was.

'Dios, señor. I'll help you. That fiend has taken my Concepcion with him. He had a launch waiting at Lyons and we came here down the river. He stopped at Tarascon and sent me on a fictitious errand. When I returned, the launch had gone. By now he's joined the bandit Michaeli in the Corsican brush; and Tom Tom the strangler is with him. You'll have your hands full.'

'Who is Tom Tom?' I queried in surprise.

'The Abyssinian you saw at Montmartre,' the matador replied. 'He was once head executioner in his land.'

From Sevilliano we obtained photographs of Ferrari and Concepcion, and the Marseilles police gave us a chart of the Negro sent by the Algerian authorities. A revenue boat landed us near Ajaccio the same night. A guide had been found who offered to take us to the Corsican's headquarters on condition that only Louys and I should go. He laughed when I suggested that a posse of gendarmes would be needed.

'If you are more than two, we shall never get within five miles of Michaeli. He has defied the police successfully for ten years. If you are wise, you'll bargain with him, for he will never shelter a thief.'

This seemed to be the opinion of the local officer also. It was evident he had a healthy respect for the bandit. After a short rest, we at once began our climb over gigantic boulders and through the dense undergrowth which the islanders term *la macchia*. A few hours of this arduous progress brought a sharp realisation of the task which lay before us; already our feet were bruised and blistered, and our clothes were in shreds. Night had come before we reached the jagged hills surrounding Michaeli's retreat. Here our guide curtly ordered us to wait until he had spoken with the sentries. He slipped like a snake behind some rocks, and a minute later we heard a shrill whistle. Instantly burly forms appeared in every cleft and our eyes were dazzled by the beams from their electric torches. A harsh voice ordered us to hold our hands above our heads, and with the unpleasant pressure of gun barrels in our backs we stood motionless whilst muscular hands searched our pockets for weapons. Fortunately we had foreseen this and carried only small automatics fastened in the lining of our caps, which the bandits did not trouble to examine. A second whistle thereupon sounded and the redoubtable Michaeli stepped forward.

'You want Ferrari, I hear,' he purred in a soft but menacing voice. 'He is not here. I have refused to admit him to my band, so go your ways.'

'Where is he?' I asked, irritated at the contemptuous tone.

'That I shall not tell you. A Corsican does not betray a fugitive from justice.'

All argument was useless and we turned away. As we passed the natural gateway between the rocks, a slim, boyish shape appeared abruptly. By the light of my lamp I saw that it was Concepcion, although her beauti-

ANGELO FERRARI

THE BODY OF THE MURDERED CONCEPCION

ful hair was hidden by the striped kerchief worn by the women of the island. She laid a finger on her lips, then, seeing that we did not move, she whispered:

'Angelo is hiding in the hut of a peasant at Valetta. The dog has deserted me. Kill him. Tell Sevilliano I have been a fool. I shall come to his trial to prove he is innocent of the murder of Cavallo and Ferrari's wife. Adios.'

On the last words she had disappeared like a shadow. I looked at Louys questioningly.

'Ferrari first,' he replied to my unspoken query. 'Michaeli's men would shoot us if we tried to take the girl.'

We had passed Valetta on our way through the brush, and now, without waiting for our treacherous guide, we stumbled and climbed over the rocks to where we saw the twinkling lights of the village below. But progress in the dark was too hazardous and we were forced to wait for the dawn. The moment there was light enough, we hid ourselves behind a grey towering crag which stood like a grim sentry just above Valetta. One by one the shepherds strode away to the distant fields with their herds, until we felt assured that only the women were left. Then with drawn pistols we crept from rock to rock towards a long ruined shed which had attracted our attention. It was the only place from which no one had come, and smoke was issuing from the roof, an unusual thing at that hour. On hands and knees, noiseless as Indians, we gained the rear of the building and peered through the broken, disjointed logs. Ferrari, shorn now of his long hair and beard, was crouching near a fire over which a pot was swinging from a chain. Inch by inch we worked round to the front, until with a bound we were over the low barrier of pine boards. But he was too

quick for us. As we sprang forward, he raised a hand to his lips and collapsed limply against the wall. All our efforts to revive him were in vain. We never discovered what the drug was he had swallowed, but he died in a few minutes. Louys remained on guard whilst I clambered down the steep road to the nearest police station. The officer listened to my story in silence, then he seized my sleeve and led me to a small sandy cove on the shore and pointed to a limp form flung by the waves against some boulders. It was the unfortunate girl who had betrayed Ferrari. She was quite dead, and there was a crimson stain on her dress where a dagger had pierced her heart.

'It was the Negro,' the gendarme said. 'We shot him this morning as he was trying to get away in a boat. He must have heard the girl tell you where Ferrari was hiding, and followed her. We came on him just as he threw her body into the sea.'

Weary and discouraged, we left Corsica the next day and returned to Paris.

Bertillon listened to my report with a wry face.

'We have very little evidence against the Spaniards and the girls,' he said, 'and Lebrun has not succeeded in analysing the stuff in those tubes yet. But we have recovered most of the stolen property, which was hidden in the leather factory. Well, we have broken up the gang, but it has not been a satisfactory investigation.'

The two Spaniards were sent to Cayenne for life, but the girls received only light sentences.

EPISODE XII

THE DEVIL'S TELEPHONE

My chief was dictating his final instructions to me before returning to Paris, when Captain Costebelle, of the local gendarmerie, hurriedly entered the room which had been placed at our disposal. He hesitated a moment before closing the door and coughed apologetically.

'I am sorry to disturb you, M. Bertillon,' he murmured, 'but there is a man named Dufour, a charcoal-burner from the valley of Valdex, in my office, who declares he has just witnessed a most atrocious crime. When he heard that you were here with experts from Paris, he insisted on speaking to you at once. The fellow is almost hysterical, and his ashen face and blue lips at first led me to think that he was either drunk or mad, but his story is so circumstantial that I cannot refuse to investigate.'

'Then why come to me?' Bertillon replied irritably. 'I have quite enough work to do, without listening to every crazy peasant who wishes to pose as chief actor in an imaginary drama in order to make himself important. We have wasted a day here investigating a stupid problem which I could have solved in my office, and I wish to reach Paris by noon. Besides, you know that what you suggest is quite against the regulations. You are in authority here and should make your report to the *juge d'instruction*.'

The police officer flushed hotly at the mention of the magistrate; already that morning he had been reprimanded for telephoning directly to the quai des Orfèvres instead of first obtaining permission from the Prefect.

'I know that,' he answered, 'but M. Domaine and I are not friendly. Besides, the fellow's tale is so grotesque that if it happens to be true I feel sure you will thank me for letting you know before the local authorities destroy all valuable traces in their usual blundering fashion. If a crime has been committed, their noisy and elephantine methods will warn the criminal and give him a chance to escape. I have always admired your wonderful skill, monsieur. You will at once infallibly point out the true solution, whereas we should accomplish nothing.'

Bertillon smiled good-humouredly.

'That is what I call gilding the pill. I fancy the Irish have a word that expresses it even better, eh?' he asked, turning to me.

'Yes,' I replied, 'blarney is what you mean, but I didn't know it had crossed the Channel.'

The gendarme grinned delightedly. 'I have often heard my mother use the word. She is Irish; but I meant every word I said. M. Bertillon *is* a genius.'

Rousseau nudged me slyly.

'I hope it will be more interesting than the case we've been working on,' he whispered. 'This Normandy village is a deadly place.'

Rousseau was right. We had come to Saint-Pierre de Guise at an urgent call from the officer who now stood in the doorway shuffling his feet and looking foolish, only to find that it was just a sordid tragedy with not one single outstanding feature.

Seeing that his crude flattering had put our chief in a good humour, the captain turned and led the way to his office. As we entered, I caught a glimpse of a man in rough fustian sitting near the window, with large grimy hands pressed to his face. He sprang up with a quick,

violent movement the instant the door was opened, and remained with arms hanging loosely at his sides, looking from one to the other of us with a fearful yet eager expression. The whites of his eyes were strikingly accentuated by the film of soot that covered his features in large patches. The man's appearance was almost ludicrous; but the twitching of his facial muscles, the slight crust of saliva on his trembling lips, and the tense, frozen expression of terror visible even through the coal dust wiped the smiles from our faces. Here was horror, real, unmitigated fear and horror, caused by some unexpected event which yet remained, a tangible incubus, oppressing his senses.

The police officer laid his hand on the man's shoulder with a reassuring gesture.

'Sit down, my friend,' he said. 'These gentlemen are from the Paris Sûreté! Tell them your story and try to remember all the details. Here, drink a little of this first to steady your nerves,' and he stepped to a cupboard and poured out a stiff dose of cognac. The charcoal-burner gulped it eagerly, then, as Bertillon drew a chair forward, he sank down with a groan, drew a coarse cloth from his pocket and wiped his hands and mouth.

'I did not know that murder was so terrible,' he began, addressing Bertillon, 'until I saw one committed before my very eyes. About two hours ago I was coming through the forest with a load of logs. I sleep in a hut near my fires, and go out at dawn for wood. I was just crossing the sandy hollow near the Witches' Pool, and had stopped to light my pipe, when I suddenly heard a man laughing. Oh, but laughing! I say a man, but it sounded more like the voice of a devil. It resembled the sound I once heard a fellow make who had drunk raw spirits until he became mad — a mixture of scream and

snarl. Of course I was startled, and twisted round quickly to see who was making that horrible noise. You know the valley, Captain?' the man queried, turning to the police officer. 'It is a wide, round, open space. Nothing but rocks and sand. Trees won't grow there. People say it was once a place where witches and sorcerers met to dance. Lots of bones were found under the stones by a professor from Rouen. I know, because I helped him to dig them up. Well, although the horrible sound had been close by me, there was no one in sight. And still shrieks and groans and that awful laughter sounded in my ears; but the moment I ran to the edge of the forest, it stopped. I searched among the bushes, running from tree to tree, but there was no one there. I gave it up at last, thinking someone was having a joke with me, and walked back to where I had left my wood. And then, as I stooped to pick up the sack, you know, a wild yell came from behind me, and I heard someone cry, "Alive still, are you, accursed witch? Alive and ready to torture me once more with your crazy jealousy? I'll kill you, and make sure this time that you don't come back." The words were quite plain, and, as I looked up, I saw, not ten feet away, a man dressed only in trousers and shirt, with a knife in his hand. It was one of those old-fashioned knives we Normandy peasants used years ago. This one had a curved black handle and a wicked blade that flashed in the sun. He was holding a woman by the throat and stabbing at her. I shouted, "Stop, stop, you assassin!" and rushed towards him, but my foot caught in the rope I had used to carry the sack. I fell on my face in the sand, and, when I had scrambled to my feet, the man and woman had disappeared. I ran all the way here to report what I had seen. The gendarmes think I'm mad, but I swear, sir, I am perfectly

sane and sober. A dreadful murder has been committed. They told me Captain Costebelle was with detectives from Paris, so I waited to tell you my story. You won't think me crazy, will you? I seem still to hear those cries and that awful laughing. I know I shall never forget what I saw.'

'Can you describe the man?' Bertillon asked, pulling out his notebook.

'Certainly, sir. He was tall and thin, with a short beard and black hair.'

'He had no hat, then?'

'No, sir; and I noticed that the trousers were dark grey and the shirt blue with a broad stripe.'

'What was the woman like?' Bertillon questioned.

'I couldn't see the face clearly. He seemed to be swinging her from side to side, but she had curly hair and wore a white dress with long sleeves, almost like a nightgown.'

'Are there any houses near the place where you say all this happened?'

'No, sir; no one lives in the forest but myself; and even my cabin is an hour's walk from the valley.'

'Yet you say these mysterious people were only partly clad. In fact, you suggest the woman wore nothing but a nightgown. Where could they have come from?'

'I don't know, sir, but I saw them as plainly as I see you now.'

'You are sure you remember the exact words he used?'

'Oh, yes, sir, they are still ringing in my ears.'

'Very well. We'll come with you to this valley. Is it far?'

'Yes, several kilometres; we must walk through the forest.'

'You have a car?' Bertillon asked, turning to Captain Costebelle.

'Certainly, sir; it can take you part of the way, but the path to the Witches' Pool is too narrow for a vehicle.'

We alighted at the edge of a vast wood of oaks and silver birches and followed our guide to a clearing which looked like a prehistoric amphitheatre. Huge spear-shaped rocks fringed a flat sandy space five or six hundred feet in diameter. Dufour pointed with trembling hand to a large sack lying not far away.

'There is where I dropped my wood, my pipe must be close beside it, and a little distance away is the spot where I saw the woman stabbed.'

'Did she not cry out?' Bertillon asked thoughtfully.

'No, I don't think she did, sir. But then he was holding her by the throat. Besides, I was so horrified that I don't really remember.'

My chief beckoned to me and we walked slowly towards the sack. Bertillon stooped every now and then and examined the footprints.

'So far the man's tale is true,' he muttered. 'The marks he left are deep and close together, owing to the weight of the burden he carried.' He picked up a burnt match. 'That was when he tried to light his pipe, and there is the pipe. H-m-m — tobacco only partly ignited. Obviously he was startled and dropped it before he had taken more than one or two puffs. Now let us see where the man and woman came from. But take care not to step on their footprints.'

A quarter of an hour passed whilst my chief examined the ground carefully within a radius of fifty feet. Abruptly he turned and looked at me with brows lifted in surprise.

'Not a sign!' he exclaimed. 'Yet on this soft ground they would leave clear impressions. Is the man mad after all? Absolutely nothing, nor any place where they could have hidden. Where did you see the crime committed?' he called to the charcoal-burner, who was standing with the officer some distance away. The fellow approached the spot where he had dropped his logs and gazed earnestly in our direction.

'Just where you are now, sir!' he cried, after measuring the distance with his eyes.

While Bertillon looked around perplexedly, Rousseau bent down and tried to lift the heavy sack; as he did so, he gave vent to a shout of surprise. 'Come here, chief; I can hear someone speaking.'

Bertillon and I ran quickly to where Rousseau was stooping, one hand held to his ear. 'You can only hear the voices when you bend down,' he added. 'Yet they are quite loud and seem to come from the spot where you were standing a moment ago.'

Bertillon knelt beside my colleague, his face flushed with excitement. Then he rose and gazed searchingly at the belt of trees. The unceasing monotonous drone and chirp of insects wove an undercurrent of sound, against which the actual silence seemed the more oppressive. Only now and then from far away came the faint hum of a passing car. Yet there was some latent influence in the atmosphere of the valley that made me feel as though at any instant a nameless and fearsome power could erupt into violent action. For several minutes we remained motionless and expectant; then with a shrug of his shoulders Bertillon turned and walked towards the trees behind us. Rousseau remained kneeling on the sand, an expression of wonder on his rugged features. Abruptly he raised his hand and beckoned to me.

'Voices again, but much fainter,' he cried. 'Here, near the ground,' — he seized my arm and pulled me towards him. As my head came level with his, it was as though a door had suddenly opened on a room full of people. First I perceived merely a dull unmeaning babble of voices. But as I bent still lower, the sounds seemed to rush to a focus and increased in power. It was a confused clamour, from which a man's voice detached itself at regular intervals and I clearly distinguished the words 'Monsieur, monsieur,' repeated several times. Following upon this call came a pounding as of sticks against a sheet of metal. I could not repress a shout of surprise at the strangeness of it all. There we were in a sandy plain, no one but ourselves in sight, yet I appeared to be surrounded by an excited, yelling crowd. When I shifted my position, the noise instantly ceased. Again, when I bent my head, I heard the same inexplicable medley of voices, as though at that one spot I entered another world — invisible, but akin to our own. It was uncanny and terrifying. I turned to see what Bertillon was doing and perceived him thoughtfully examining a queer concave rock which towered to a great height some distance behind us. His apparent indifference surprised me. I could not tear myself away from the fascination of this unprecedented phenomenon. The unconscious love of the mystic and supernatural, which lies deep down in the fibres of every human being, set my nerves tingling. And then, brutally and unexpectedly, as though the phantom door had closed again, the clamour ceased completely just as Bertillon came towards us; in his eyes was the gleam I knew well.

'We have stumbled by chance on a miracle of minute adjustment,' he exclaimed. 'What we hear is probably miles away. The sounds are reflected in some strange

fashion by that mouth-shaped rock near the trees, and come to a focus at this spot and only here. How they travel across that sandy plain I cannot conceive. You are sure that you *saw* the man with the knife?' he demanded abruptly of the charcoal-burner, who was still standing motionless beside the gendarme.

At the question he started as though waking from a trance.

'Certain, monsieur, absolutely certain. I'd know him again at once.'

'Very well — leave your sack and come with us. We'll trace this devil's telephone to its starting-point. Spread out on each side and examine the ground all of you. I'll walk in front. There may be footprints, but I fancy we shall find nothing until we get to the fringe of the wood.'

Slowly we crossed the arena of fine sand, but the surface was smooth and even, and we saw nothing but some tiny trails where rabbits had scampered to cover. Bertillon halted a short distance from the first row of oaks.

'Look!' he cried, pointing at a broad granite slab. 'The business grows ever queerer. I wonder if the formation is natural or whether the old Gallic priests conceived it. This valley was undoubtedly used in their day for magic phenomena and must have been the scene of many strange rituals. The stone is so placed that it relays and amplifies every sound that comes from the funnel formed by those trees. There is a long narrow passage right through them, and rocks have been carried there in the past so that nothing can grow to obstruct it. Yet from the opposite side the forest appears dense and continuous. What a discovery for our archæologists! But for the moment we are hunting for a

criminal. I shall return later and examine this strange place thoroughly.'

Although we walked until noon, finally arriving at the broad departmental highway, we saw no sign of any likely spot where a struggle such as the woodsman had described could have taken place. At last Bertillon threw up his hands with a helpless gesture.

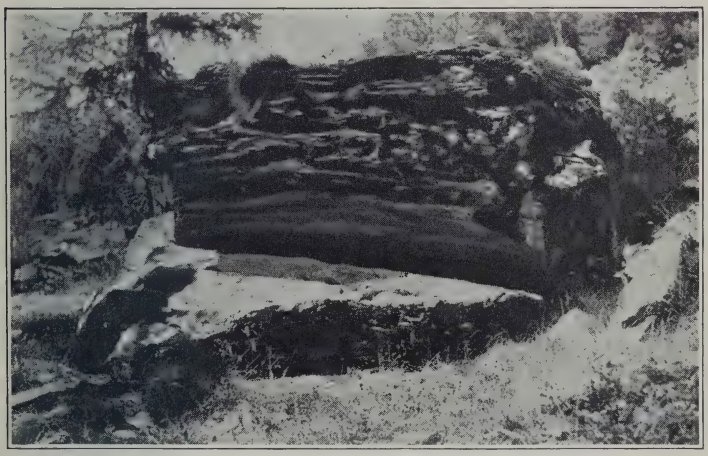
'It's no use. We shall never find the starting-point of those vibrations. Either the sounds transmitted by that prehistoric device are not caused by voices at all and the charcoal-burner merely imagined the laughter and screams, or else the spot from which they originated is far away. One thing is certain, the scene he described so vividly was nothing but an hallucination created by the mysterious and terrifying nature of the acoustic phenomenon. He only fancied he saw the woman stabbed. A species of subjective impression, if you like.'

'But I also heard someone speak,' I objected. 'I distinctly caught the word "monsieur" repeated several times.'

'Well, perhaps you did. We all heard something. Those stones are unquestionably a species of primitive telephone. Probably there was once a pagan god or an oracle in the valley. Dufour may thus actually have heard all that he related, but I am convinced he only imagined the episode of the man and woman. Anyway, if a crime has indeed been committed, we shall learn of it. Meanwhile, we can do nothing but wait, and our work in Paris is urgent. At present the chances are a thousand to one against finding the exact point of emission. I have heard of whispering-galleries, but in every case there was a wall to carry the sound. Here it apparently jumps from point to point.' Turning to the captain of gendarmes, he added, 'I advise you to say

MME. DE VERNEUIL

M. DE VERNEUIL



THE DEVIL'S TELEPHONE

nothing of all this to your *juge d'instruction*; he would only laugh at you. If there should be any development, inform me at once. It would be wise to keep that fellow Dufour from talking also. If there has really been a tragedy enacted somewhere, the murderer is certainly unaware that the echo of it was carried in such an uncanny way through space.'

Back in our familiar surroundings at the quai des Orfèvres, the whole adventure seemed incredibly fantastic. Rousseau summed up our thoughts by saying:

'Auto-suggestion, chief, that's what it was. That sandy place is haunted.'

But for once he was wrong. When I arrived at the Sûreté, the next morning, a surprise awaited me. Bertillon, Colbert, and Rousseau were standing beside one of our fast cars dressed for a journey and immediately signalled me to join them.

My chief pulled a paper from his pocket as I hurried up.

'Listen to this!' he cried, and his voice had the shrill intonation which betokened great excitement. 'From the "Courrier de Brest," and I've had further details by telephone from our friend the Captain. "Pierre de Verneuil, the last male descendant of one of the oldest Norman families, who had only lately inherited his vast estate, was found dead this morning in a wood in which he often hunted. His face was terribly swollen, as from some poison. Near him lay a knife such as poachers use, with a lock blade and curved handle. The body has not been touched, for the local authorities intend to call in expert assistance from Paris. According to the servants, Monsieur de Verneuil, who was a widower, but about to marry again, had been queer in his ways for some time, so that it may be merely suicide."

'So much for the newspaper report. Captain Costebelle telephoned early this morning and gave me a detailed description of the dead man, which, curiously enough, corresponds to the phantom murderer seen by the charcoal-burner. Come along; we must arrive before anything is moved.'

At Saint-Pierre de Guise we picked up our friend the Captain, who had already sent for Dufour.

'La Ferrière, where de Verneuil lived, is twenty miles from here,' the police officer said, with a queer catch in his voice. 'Fortunately, it belongs to my circuit, and I have given strict orders to keep everyone away. The wood is part of the Verneuil estate and surrounded by barbed-wire fences.'

Two gendarmes were on guard near the body, which was lying on its side in a curiously twisted, huddled position. The hands were clenched and purple and the distorted features fully confirmed the theory that he had been poisoned. The moment Dufour caught sight of the face, he started back with a hoarse bellow of alarm.

'I know him! Without a doubt, it is the murderer I saw in the Witches' Valley. And the knife, monsieur; there is the very knife with which he stabbed the woman.' His shaking hand pointed to the weapon which lay beside the body.

'All right,' my chief snapped. 'Keep back now, everybody.'

For an hour Bertillon worked feverishly, alternately examining the ground, the dead man, and the dagger. Then he crept cautiously through the undergrowth, scrutinising the ground at every step. He was gone so long that Rousseau began to mutter impatiently. I could see he was devoured with curiosity and eager to get to the bottom of the mystery. At last the snapping of

twigs and rustling of leaves informed us that our chief was returning. He emerged suddenly from the bushes, flushed and breathless, but a glance at his face showed me that the investigation had not proved successful. Without a word he brushed past us and picked up the knife by the point.

'Smell this,' he said, holding it under my nose. 'What do you make of it?'

A queer but agreeable odour emanated from the weapon. It was like a mixture of Oriental perfume and fragrant spices.

I looked up perplexedly. 'Would that be the poison which killed de Verneuil?' I hazarded.

'Nonsense; that's no poison. Ambergris and some aromatic drug. Besides, he has not been stabbed. There are several tiny swollen punctures on his wrist and inside his left hand, but the knife did not make them! They look more like marks such as the fangs of a venomous snake leave. Devil take the charcoal-burner and his silly story! There is no sign of a dead woman. I could not follow de Verneuil's footprints beyond the gravel path. Have the body carried to the house, Captain, and apply for a search-warrant. Telephone to Paris, Rousseau, and request Dr. Maupert to come here at once with the necessary instruments for a *post-mortem*. Lebrun had better come with him. Explain what we have found and tell him to bring a microscope and his chemical case. I shall not wait for the magistrate's order, however. We'll examine the house and question the servants immediately. What is the name of the woman de Verneuil intended to marry, Captain?' Bertillon asked abruptly, as the officer was about to go.

'Mademoiselle Hélène Vautrais. She is an orphan and lives not far away.'

'I should be glad if you would request the lady to come to the house, then. I must question her. I shall not need Dufour until I have more data, but tell him not to go back to Saint-Pierre; I may require him when the lady arrives.'

Placing the knife in one of our special cases, Bertillon passed his arm through mine and led me towards a huge grey dwelling, half castle, half manor, which loomed through the trees in the distance.

'This looks more like a case for a priest than for a detective,' he said with a short laugh. 'A peasant stops to light his pipe at the one spot where sounds produced twenty miles away come to a focus by means of an incredibly strange combination of acoustic mirrors. The cries and laughter so impress him that he becomes mad and fancies he sees a murder committed. The vision, delusion, mirage, or whatever it was, enables him to describe accurately a man and a weapon which are found the next day. The man is dead, and the only apparent cause for his death are punctures in his hand that look like the bite of a poisonous reptile. Beside him is a knife — the knife seen by Dufour; but instead of blood-stains on the blade, there is a strong smell of ambergris. Truly we of the Sûreté have grappled with many strange and grotesque problems, but this one bids fair to stand alone.'

'Remember the Rafael Cortez case, sir,' I ventured. 'You said you would never believe in the supernatural again.'

Bertillon pressed my arm and chuckled. 'I do not for a moment believe this crime to be anything but the result of a fantastic and complex chain of circumstances. If that fellow really killed a woman, it is for us to find who she was and where she is hidden, but at all events

he appears to have been murdered, and if so I intend to discover who did it. Here we are.'

We had arrived at a huge iron-studded door of forbidding aspect. My chief pushed it open and we entered a vast hall, dark with heavy beams and oak panelling. Sitting forlornly on a long bench were three men and a girl. We learned that they were the only servants de Verneuil had retained when he inherited the estate. All were loud in their praises of the dead man's generosity; but agreed that he suffered constantly from spells of melancholia, when he would send them all to their quarters and forbid them to enter the main dwelling. At such times his moods would veer abruptly from a mere desire for solitude to fits of insane rage from which even the sturdy foresters would flee in terror.

Only the butler, a quiet, shrivelled, grey-haired man typical of the Normandy peasant stock from which he sprang, appeared singularly reluctant to talk about the dead man; but Bertillon possessed the ability to adapt his manner to the whims of those he wished to question, and succeeded in breaking through the old fellow's reserve. His name was Thomas Ladigue and he had served the family for forty years. Pierre de Verneuil, we learned, had spent most of his life in Egypt and Tunis, where he had married a very beautiful and wealthy Greek. From that moment constant misfortune dogged him. His business, which had been prosperous, declined rapidly in spite of unceasing toil. He had come to France in obedience to an urgent summons from the family's legal advisers only to find that he was in danger of losing the heavily mortgaged estate which he had but lately inherited. Then, just as he was about to return to Egypt, the news came that his wife was dying. He arrived too late to see her alive again. Thereupon de Verneuil had

definitely settled down at La Ferrière. It was rumoured that the dead wife's money had enabled him to free the estate from the incubus of ever-increasing liabilities.

'There was a portrait of a very beautiful dark-eyed woman in master's bedroom,' the butler added thoughtfully. 'It was always hidden by a velvet curtain, but once, when I entered in response to the bell, I saw M. de Verneuil standing before it with a corner of the drapery lifted. His expression when he turned and saw me was so terrible that I dropped the letters I had brought and ran from the room.'

'He was still mourning her loss, you think?' Bertillon asked.

A mixture of doubt and aversion flickered across the butler's face.

'I cannot say, monsieur; but — well, on that day it had seemed to me as though he hated her. The next morning the maid came to me with the news that the painting had disappeared.'

'Well — that is natural enough, since he was about to marry again. He would not wish to offend his fiancée by keeping the picture where she would constantly see it. What kind of woman is this Mademoiselle Vautrais?'

'Very proud and reserved, monsieur. The Vautrais were once great aristocrats. But it would never have been a happy union. She is not liked in the neighbourhood. No one ever saw her smile. He needed someone young and jolly. However, poor Master Pierre is dead. It breaks my heart to think of that. I was already here when he was only a lad, lively and full of mischief.'

'Have you any idea who killed him? Did anything occur within the last month which would help us to discover the murderer?'

The butler's face assumed a stony, wilfully stupid expression, and he shook his head slowly. 'I am only an old servant, sir; I know nothing of my poor master's private affairs.'

Bertillon shrugged his shoulders.

'Very well, conduct us to his study and bedroom, and when my men come, send them to me. By the way, did you ever see any other woman here, any visitors more than usually intimate?'

'Never. Master lived a very quiet life. Hunting and fishing were his only pleasures. There was no other woman.'

Bertillon nodded, and, preceded by the servant, we climbed the wide staircase to the first floor. The study was a large room with countless books on shelves and in cases. Near the window stood a large old-fashioned writing-table; several comfortable chairs were scattered about, and in a corner was a typewriter on an American roll-top desk. Signing to the butler to leave us, Bertillon walked slowly along each wall, examining the volumes.

'A man's books are a certain guide to his character, but these were here before de Verneuil came. I do not think he read much. Sit down while I examine his papers.'

De Verneuil had been a tidy man, and as letter after letter was unfolded and put away again, Bertillon gave vent to his growing irritation:

'It's not likely that so methodical a man will have left anything compromising lying about, yet —— Ha! this is curious,' he suddenly exclaimed. 'A letter of advice from a shipping firm in Marseilles and a bill for the transport of a coffin. Good Heavens! Here pinned to it is a permit from Egypt and a second one from our own people authorising the admission into France and

interment in the family vault of Madame Eulalia de Verneuil, deceased in Alexandria.'

Bertillon sat down heavily and pulled a cigar from his case, an unusual proceeding. It was the first time I had seen him smoke when busy on an investigation. I was about to leave the room, for I knew from long experience that he disliked to have anyone near him when mentally reviewing all the points of a complex investigation, but as I opened the door Rousseau came bustling in to report that the doctor and our analyst Lebrun would arrive shortly. The body had already been carried into the house and placed in the billiard room adjoining the hall.

Bertillon waved us away impatiently. 'We must wait until Dr. Maupert discovers how de Verneuil died,' he exclaimed. 'Sit down and keep quiet.'

We subsided into chairs and watched our chief anxiously. His eyes closed, and after a few puffs the cigar remained unheeded in a tray. To anyone unused to his ways Bertillon would have appeared to be asleep, but I knew that when his active brain grappled with a subtle problem his body became an inert shell. In fancy I followed the invisible yet unerring mental processes of his extraordinary mind until I became lost in a drowsy maze of theories. A sharp exclamation from Bertillon caused me to leap from my chair in alarm. He was standing before me with flashing eyes. His face was twitching, and twice he moistened his lips before he succeeded in articulating clearly. 'I've got it — I do believe! Where is that knife?'

I handed him the box in which it had been placed. He laid the weapon on a sheet of paper and examined it eagerly with his lenses, muttering incoherently to himself.

'Call the butler,' he ordered abruptly, replacing the weapon with an air of finality.

I was about to obey when the old man himself opened the door and ushered in a tall, austere woman, with handsome, regular features, although there was something repellent in the thick-lipped mouth and knitted brows.

'Mademoiselle Vautrais,' the butler announced.

Bertillon bowed. 'You were affianced to M. de Verneuil, I understand,' he said courteously. 'Sit down, please, mademoiselle. I should like to put a few questions to you.'

'Have you discovered yet who murdered my poor fiancé?' the woman queried in a singularly hard metallic voice, choosing a seat which placed her face in deep shadow.

'I think so, mademoiselle. Tell me, did M. de Verneuil ever speak about his dead wife to you?'

The woman started nervously.

'That is a strange question to ask of me. What has a dead woman to do with this matter?'

'I may be able to tell you that later. For the moment I beg you will answer me. I take it he did speak to you about her and that the subject was the cause of a quarrel between you. Am I right?'

'We did not quarrel, but he spoke to me about her after I had consented to marry him. I knew he was a widower, of course. One day he mentioned that there was a stipulation in her will that her body should be brought to France and placed in the old family vault if he ever decided to marry again. I did not like the idea and told him so. I know he corresponded with her lawyers about it and received several letters which upset him very much, but he would not tell me what they con-

tained. I believe, however, that her money was to revert to charities if he failed to carry out this condition. Since he had already spent large sums in clearing off the principal mortgages, and restoring a ruined wing of the manor, the reimbursement of these sums would have placed him in a very difficult position. Nevertheless, he finally agreed to give way to me. You see, a woman has strange intuitions. I am convinced his wife inserted that clause only because she believed that the arrival of her body at the moment he was to marry again would make her presence a very tangible thing and cause him to feel he was being unfaithful to her memory. She knew his mystic superstitious nature well. If it did not cause him to break off his engagement, it would at least make him very unhappy and perhaps lead to quarrels. She must have been cruelly jealous and possessed the subtlety of the Orient. Otherwise, why did she not request him to place her coffin in the family vault immediately after her death? You understand, don't you? If he had done that, her memory would not have been revived in such brutal fashion just when he had every right to forget.'

'And did he make arrangements, after all, for the transport of her body to France?'

'No, no — he did not. He would have told me so.'

'Thank you, mademoiselle. May I request you to leave us a moment? I should like to ask the butler something.'

The woman rose at once, but the glance she shot at us from the door was hard and hostile.

The old butler had stood listening to all this with an ashen face. He looked at my chief now with terror in his eyes.

Bertillon smiled in friendly fashion. 'There are only

one or two details I want to be sure about, Ladigue,' he said reassuringly. 'You stated that —— By the way, here is your knife,' and with a quick movement he held out the weapon found beside the dead man.

The butler made a half-step forward, then he cried wildly: 'Yes, yes, it is mine — but I didn't kill my master.'

Bertillon gave him no time to recover.

'Come, my friend,' he said sharply, 'you must tell me all you know. I am not suggesting that you murdered de Verneuil, but you helped to carry the coffin to the vault?'

The old fellow looked round at the door to see if it was shut, then with a gasp, as though impelled to answer against his will, he whispered: 'Yes, sir, but I swore an oath that I would tell no one. My poor master fetched the body from Paris at night in his own car, and together we carried it to the vault under the family chapel.'

'Well, what then?'

'Nothing, sir. It was almost dawn when we had finished and I left him alone at his request. He wished to pray, he said. I never saw him alive again. He did not come to breakfast, but I had seen that he was in one of his black moods and I did not dare to disturb him. But towards noon I went to the chapel with the chauffeur and a gardener. The vault was locked and no sign of my master. We pounded on the door and called him, but he had gone. In the evening one of the foresters reported that he had seen a man running across some fields dressed only in shirt and trousers. I remembered then that M. de Verneuil had taken his coat off when we moved some of the heavy oak coffins in the vault to make room for the one he had brought. I

immediately organized a search-party. We hunted all night and came upon him at dawn as you saw him — dead.'

'How did he come to have your knife?'

'I lent it to him in the vault to cut the ropes round the outer case.'

Bertillon nodded thoughtfully; then he went to the billiard room and returned a moment later with a large key.

'Is this the key of the vault?' he asked.

'Yes, sir.'

'Very well. I fancy that is the car from Paris which has just arrived. Show both gentlemen in here. Then get ready to come with me to the chapel.'

Dr. Maupert came bustling in with his usual cheery smile, followed by Lebrun carrying a microscope and a bag filled with reactants and test-tubes.

'Get to work on this knife, mon ami,' Bertillon said briskly, handing Lebrun the butler's knife. Lebrun immediately cleared the table, placed a clean cloth over it, and began unpacking his implements.

Bertillon watched his preparations interestedly for a moment, then he led Dr. Maupert into the room where the body lay.

I sat down beside my colleague, who had already adjusted a slide on which he had placed some minute particles scraped from the edge of the blade. Almost immediately he peered over his glasses at me with a queer expression.

'Epithelial,' he said. 'Particles of dried skin and embalmers' spices. Who has been cutting up a mummy?'

'What!' Rousseau and I cried in unison. 'Mummy! What do you mean?'

'What I say. There are traces of skin — human, I

should say — and several particles of costly embalmers' spices on this knife.'

'That's what I thought,' Bertillon cried from the door. 'Call the butler now and bring lanterns. We'll get to the bottom of all this at last.'

At the door we were joined by the captain of gendarmes, who had returned from Saint-Pierre de Guise with our search-warrant.

'I have also brought an order for the arrest of the murderer,' he cried boisterously. 'The *juge d'instruction* filled it in at my request. I know you've cleared up the mystery by now. The name is left in blank, of course.'

Bertillon smiled grimly at the officer's sally, but made no remark. Preceded by the old butler, we marched through the park until we came to an old ruined building, with unglazed, barred windows, standing in a clearing. Here Bertillon motioned us to wait and advanced alone, illuminating the ground with his electric torch. Twice I saw him stoop to pick up something from the path. The second time he called to Rousseau to cut a short stake from one of the bushes, which he drove into the ground to mark the spot.

The vault was at the bottom of some crumbling steps under a small stone slab and protected by an iron door. The moment this was opened, an overwhelming wave of sweet spices swept over us. It was so dense and cloying that we gasped for breath.

Bertillon lifted his light and pointed dramatically at the body of a woman lying against a stone column supporting the roof. While we stood gaping in amazement at the unexpected sight, he stepped quickly forward and dropped to one knee.

'Beautiful! Beautiful!' he cried. 'It is the most perfect example of the embalmer's art I have ever seen.'

We crowded round our chief and gazed in wonder. Bertillon was right. The handsome, swarthy face might have been that of a woman asleep. Not a blemish, not a stain, was to be seen. The lips were red, on the olive skin was the hue of life, and the eyelids with their long lashes almost appeared to quiver. Dark, silky hair framed what would have been an exquisite picture but for an expression of feline cruelty and sneering triumph which pervaded every line and muscle. Silently we waited while Bertillon examined the uncanny face with light and lens.

'Some kind of enamel has been applied to the skin. It is hard like porcelain — listen!' — and the point of his finger-nail produced a sharp sound as he tried to scratch the carmine cheek.

His contemptuous attitude grated on my nerves, but I was soon to understand what caused it.

Now, as I stooped lower, I saw that the white gown, which was fastened around the throat by a golden brooch, was slashed and torn, and beneath it were numerous gashes, obviously made by the knife Lebrun had examined.

'Come here,' Bertillon called, beckoning to the butler, who was gripping Rousseau with frenzied hands as though seeking to draw sanity from the contact.

'Stand up, man — there is nothing to be afraid of; this woman has been dead many years. You saw that painting once. Tell me, do you recognise the face?'

'Yes — yes, sir. It is the same. But you are wrong. Madame de Verneuil must have been alive when we carried her in here.'

Bertillon gave a short laugh and walked towards a heavy oaken coffin. Although all the screws had been withdrawn, the lid, surmounted by a great silver crucifix,

appeared to be tightly shut. On the ground not far away lay a second outer shell.

'Did you help to unpack it?' he asked, turning again to the terrified butler.

'No, sir; master would not let me break the seals. I remember he tested them all to make sure they were intact.'

Bertillon examined the rough outer case. 'Yes — I see they are government seals. The harbour authorities merely verified them. Every possibility was foreseen. What a devil she was!'

Pulling a hammer from his pocket, he began to tap the coffin. I don't know what it was we expected would happen, but our chief was evidently following a definite plan. After a while he desisted and scrutinised the top and sides again, then with a long-drawn 'Ah' he stooped and picked up a small silver key.

Give me a pair of pliers, Rousseau,' he said quietly. With these he grasped one end and inserted it in a lock which I had not noticed until then. It was evidently a spring lock, for the key would not enter, although he exerted considerable pressure.

'Push against the crucifix with a piece of wood,' he cried sharply. 'But don't approach too closely.' Abruptly, as Rousseau obeyed, there was a vicious snap, the key turned, and, like a flicker of light, numerous tiny sharp teeth stabbed through the wood around the lock and from the silver cross. At that Rousseau shouted in alarm and staggered back. At once the entire lid lifted and swung open with a metallic clang and a species of hinged frame rose a foot or more from the empty coffin.

Bertillon dropped the pliers and wiped his hands and face with a handkerchief.

'What a diabolical contrivance! You understand, don't you? This woman whose body we have just found must have been tigerishly jealous. When she learned that her days on earth were numbered, she made up her mind to prevent de Verneuil from marrying again. We shall find out what the exact stipulation was, but evidently he had to place her coffin in this vault and open it for a last good-bye if he really decided to take another wife. She must have prepared it all long before she died. I dare say she knew all about his mortgaged estate and depended on his need of her money. Once he had spent part of it, he was compelled to submit to the clause in her will. She knew also that he would wish to be alone when he opened the coffin. When he tried to insert the key, he naturally placed his hand on the crucifix for purchase, and those steel fangs, which are undoubtedly poisoned, pierced his skin. At the same time the lid swung back as you have just seen and the body, which rested on that hinged frame, rose as though alive. No doubt the man became mad at the vision of this phantom from the past and stabbed at her. It was his insane laughter which the charcoal-burner heard. I found a shred from her gown and some of her hair on the pall outside. He must in his frenzy have dragged the body out into the open and then flung it against the column where it now lies. *De Verneuil was murdered by his dead wife, and the murder was premeditated.* Well, she is beyond the reach of human justice, and our investigation must end here. Come, we have endured enough for to-night. To-morrow we shall test the curious acoustic phenomenon which led us to this place. Without it we should never have discovered how the man died. I believe this crypt to be the starting point of the aërial whispering-gallery.

'We will place the body of that she-devil in her death-dealing coffin for to-night, and leave it open. To-morrow workmen shall break those steel fangs and destroy the mechanism. I will also let you have my report, Captain Costebelle. Here is your warrant. Inform the magistrate that we could not make use of it.'

We all gave a sigh of relief as the heavy door of the vault slammed shut behind us.

My nerves were badly jangled and I slept little. I was ready to start, therefore, when my chief summoned me. Rousseau had left for Saint-Pierre de Guise. It had been arranged that he should note the exact moment at which he heard Bertillon speak, so that we could determine the spot which formed the acoustic base. At noon he returned with copious notes. It was truly from the old Norman vault that the sound waves started on their extraordinary journey through space. They reached Rousseau standing in the Witches' Valley two minutes later. He recognised our voices and was able to understand every word. Bertillon spent several days searching for further stones, which he believed must have been placed at calculated intervals to relay and amplify sound, much as an echo is tossed from peak to peak in the mountains, but he was unable to find them. Nor could we ever clear up the mystery of the charcoal-burner's vision. He was taken by the gendarmes to identify Madame de Verneuil, and declared emphatically that, although he had not seen her face, he recognised the hair and the white gown with the long sleeves.

Bertillon's theory that what Dufour thought he saw was due to a species of telepathy was the only credible explanation, but it satisfied no one.

THE END

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 08784 920 2

" 'THE LIGHTS, FOR GOD'S SAKE, THE LIGHTS,' someone yelled. At the same moment I found the switch and saw the man Janos lying on the ground with a dagger in his breast and his face streaked with blood. Oh, it was horrible, horrible . . ." Thus Madame Lafargue concluded her testimony in the strange murder of the Séance Room. Canette, the medium, and the seven others who had been locked in that room when Janos was stabbed could add nothing to her statement. And yet the bloody finger prints across the dead man's white shirt-front belonged to none of them. Bertillon discovered that they corresponded with those of a certain convict named Marinetti, but Marinetti had been buried on Devil's Island years before.

CRIMES OF VIOLENCE AND REVENGE

By H. Ashton-Wolfe

THE 'detective story' of fiction fades into insignificance when it is set alongside a chronicle of facts such as Mr. Ashton-Wolfe has gathered from his long acquaintance with real criminals. The New York *Herald Tribune* called his previous book, 'Crimes of Love and Hate,' 'the most fascinating volume of real crimes ever given to these wise old hands.' His new collection of true stories of actual crimes is even more exciting. Among the outlaws it describes are the Terror of Marseilles; Red Lopez and Jack Harley, outlaws of our own West; the Bandit of Corsica; Dimiran the Monster; the Outlaws of the Black Forest; and others equally thrilling.

Ashton-Wolfe's studies with the famous Bertillon and his work as interpreter in the French and English courts have brought him international recognition as a criminologist. He is an accomplished linguist and has matched his wits against the most dangerous criminals of Europe.

Illustrated

Among Those Who Felt the Thrill of Evil Were:

MARINETTI:

Who came back from a grave on Devil's Island to avenge his sweetheart and to leave his bloody finger prints on the shirt-fronts of his two enemies, stabbed during a séance.

PROFESSOR LA MARRA:

An eminent surgeon with six toes who spirited away three dead men from a sealed room in Montmartre and left behind only a bloody footprint.

DOCTOR BOUGRAT:

He might have continued his Jekyll and Hyde career but for a marked translation of Poe's "The Black Cat" which Ashton-Wolfe found on his surgery table.

THE TATTOOED MEN:

Each carried his death warrant tattooed on his back; directions for finding buried gold, stolen from a Taureg sheik years before.

CHUNDAH LAL:

An Indian hypnotist who arranged counterfeit murders and robbed rich people of their identity, but who had the last laugh on Dr. Bertillon when his car was driven over a precipice.

M. COUDADAL:

Who walked on the ceiling and whose strange nightmares resulted in three horrible murders.